RELATIONSHIPS, BOUNDARIES & AUTONOMY

Staying With Myself in Relationship

About 5-10 minutes to prepare or reflect

This workbook offers a gentle introduction to the practice for you to explore on your own; deeper work is best undertaken with the support of a professional counsellor.

Include yourself while paying attention to someone else

In a conversation, your attention may go towards the other person: what they need, how they feel or what they might think of you. This practice makes a little room for your own experience alongside your interest in them.

You can listen with care and still notice your preference, your limits or something you would like to say. You do not need to disclose everything you notice.

1. Choose an ordinary interaction

Think of a manageable conversation with someone you feel safe enough to differ from. You can prepare for a future interaction or reflect on one afterwards. Keep the situation small and familiar.

2. Notice where your attention goes

What are you attending to in the other person? Separate what you can observe from what you imagine they might be thinking. You may not know how they feel unless they tell you.

3. Make brief contact with your own experience

Ask yourself: "What is happening for me?" Notice any clear thought, feeling, preference or need for time. A few words are enough. If body awareness is helpful, notice the support beneath you without needing to search inward.

4. Hold both perspectives in mind

What have you understood about the other person, and what matters to you? They may fit together or differ. You can acknowledge a difference without needing to resolve it immediately.

5. Choose how to stay in contact

You might continue listening, ask a question, express a small preference or ask for time. Choose what fits the conversation. If you are reflecting afterwards, simply note what you would like to remember next time.

You can return attention to the conversation after a brief check-in. There is no need to monitor yourself continuously.

Staying with yourself does not mean staying in a harmful interaction. If expressing a difference could lead to threats, punishment or harm, leave that situation out of this exercise and seek appropriate support.

STAYING WITH MYSELF IN RELATIONSHIP

Include both perspectives

The conversation, and what I noticed about the other person:

What was happening for me, including anything I wanted or needed:

What I chose to say or do, or would like to remember:

An ordinary example

A friend is enthusiastic about a plan. You are interested in seeing them, but the suggested time does not suit you. You can notice both your wish for connection and your availability, then decide whether to suggest another time. Your preference can be part of the conversation.

Your experience matters even if it is unclear or different from the other person's. You can take time before deciding what, if anything, to share.

STAYING WITH MYSELF IN RELATIONSHIP

Returning to the practice

Over four weeks

Use the pace in your Development Map plan if this exercise has been recommended. Work with one kind of ordinary interaction. Preparation or private reflection is enough.

Week 1 | Notice your attention

Look back at a conversation. Where did your attention go, and what did you recognise about your own experience? No change is required yet.

Week 2 | Include a brief check-in

Before or after an interaction, take a little time to notice your own thoughts, feelings or preference. If it feels natural during the conversation, keep the check-in brief and return to listening.

Week 3 | Try a small response

Consider a manageable way to include what matters to you: ask a question, offer a preference or request time. You can rehearse privately instead of trying it with the other person.

Week 4 | Review what supports connection

What helped you stay aware of yourself while attending to someone else? What became effortful? Keep what supports contact and leave continuous self-monitoring aside.

What helps me remain present to myself and the other person?

This practice supports self-reflection. It is not a treatment or a substitute for professional support.

Work with me

If this workbook has opened up something you would like to explore further, you are welcome to get in touch. I offer psychotherapy and counselling in Dalston, East London, and online. We can use an initial session to consider what brings you to therapy and whether working together feels right for you.

BOOK AN INITIAL SESSION	CONTACT ME