PSYCHOEDUCATION / CLIENT HANDOUT

Understanding Harmful Relationship Patterns

How to think about repeated behaviour without diagnosing another person

Relationships can become distressing when criticism, intimidation, inconsistency, isolation, or dismissal occurs repeatedly. The most useful starting point is often to look at what happens, how often it happens, what follows, and how it affects your wellbeing.

A diagnostic label is not necessary to take your experience seriously. People can exhibit harmful behaviours without a personality-disorder diagnosis; likewise, having a diagnosis does not by itself establish that someone has been abusive.

Intermittent kindness can make an unhealthy pattern confusing. It may help to observe the whole pattern over time rather than interpreting one positive or negative event as the whole relationship.

QUESTIONS YOU MAY WANT TO CONSIDER

- [ ] Do I feel able to disagree?
- [ ] Can I express ordinary needs without retaliation?
- [ ] Do I feel free to maintain relationships outside this one?

NEXT RESOURCE: Start with Worksheet 01: Noticing Relationship Patterns. Choose observation over labeling.

Suggested reading: Durvasula, R. (2023). Dynamics of Narcissistic and Antagonistic Relationships. PESI training materials. | Durvasula, R. (2023). Working with the Fallout of Narcissistic Abuse. PESI training materials.