Development of Autonomy Survival Style



Has its roots between ages eighteen month and four years old.

A toddler's intense conflict between their growing desire for independence and the renewed, powerful need for closeness and security with their primary caregiver.

This result is a push-pull dynamic, a child might dart away to explore but quickly return for reassurance, an emotional struggle between autonomy and safety, a crucial task for developing a stable sense of self (balance of independence and connection!).

Highly anxious parents undermine children's development of will: Control or limit child's natural impulses (autonomy) for fear of relational loss.

Client learns to give up authentic self to sustain attachment relationship (ADAPTIVE); also over time develops a secret self that holds resentment.

Autonomy Survival Style

My parents were over controlling I am a people pleaser

If you REALLY got to know me, you would leave or judge.

I often say yes when I really mean no. I avoid conflict.

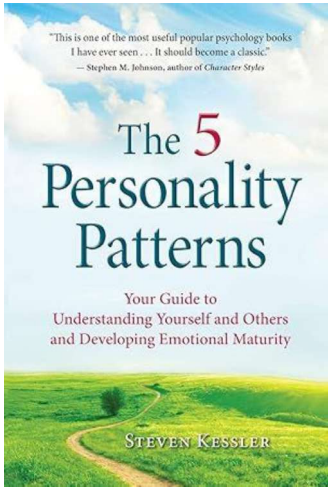
I had to please my parents to earn love. I feel stuck.

I fear disappointing others. I feel pressured and burdened.

I feel trapped/controlled in intimate relationships.

I have ambivalence about making decisions.

“Life is a heavy coat over me, and it gets heavier and heavier throughout the day. The Things to Do list grows longer and longer, but I cannot move.
I am stuck in thick molasses. I push and struggle, but barely move. I push harder and harder,
but I can’t move.”



Common themes/dynamics

- ➔ **Breeding ground for depression, feeling stuck.**
- ➔ **Nice, sweet, compliant, "good girl", fear of disappointing others countering for anger, rebelliousness, even enjoy disappointing others.**
- ➔ **Fear of losing sense of self in intimate relationships; avoidant. Intimacy = Agenda, control, smothering**
- ➔ **Pleasing to get love/connection and to control others' reactions.**
- ➔ **Anger toward others is disowned. Can turn inward in form of pressure, harsh, judgemental, driving toward the self (masochistic).**
- ➔ **To protect attachment child gives up authentic self to earn love (ADAPTIVE!).**
- ➔ **Sympathetically dominant: Highly charged and contained. Tension in neck and shoulders, high blood pressure, pinched nerves. Digestive issues.**
- ➔ **My only two choices are to rebel or submit.**
- ➔ **Can lead to hidden pleasures and even secret lives.**

Moving to resolution



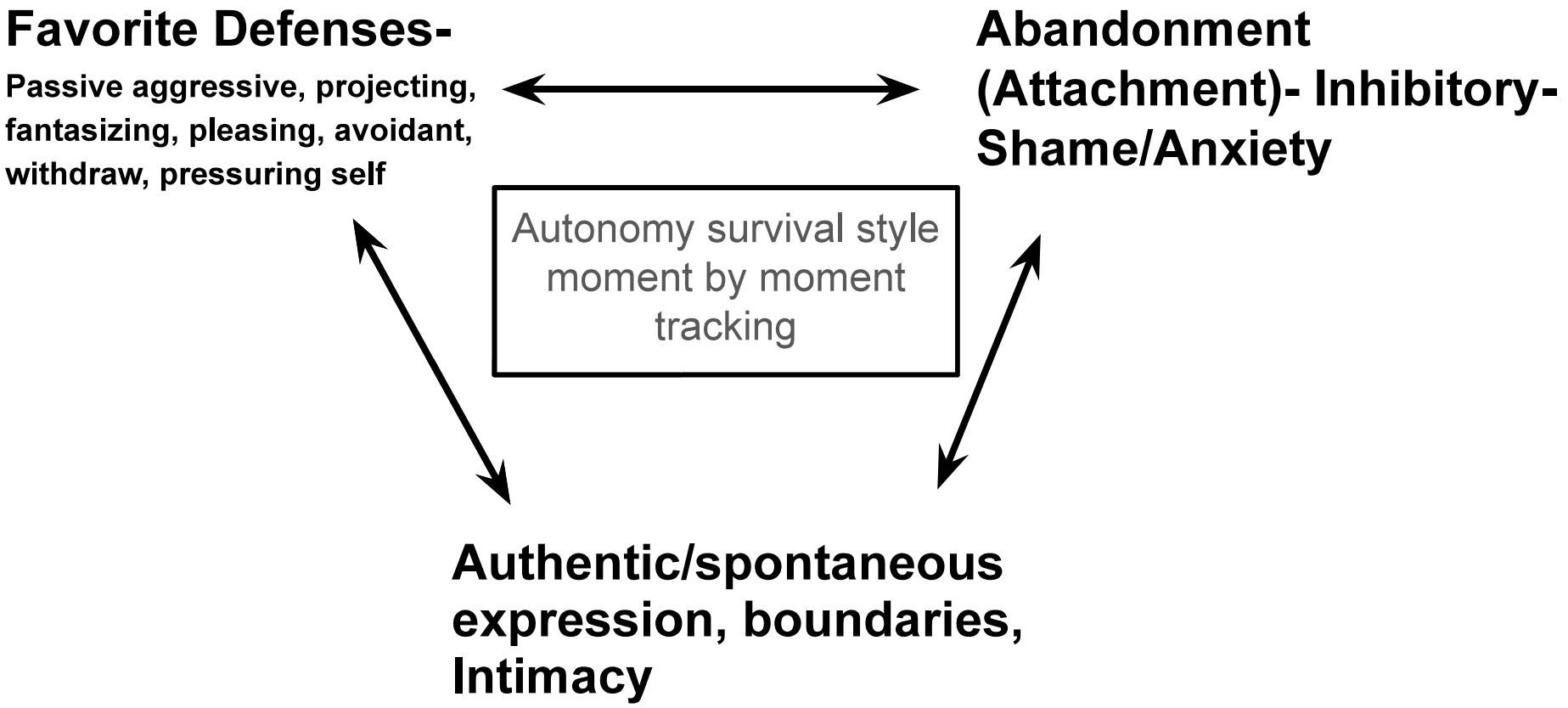
- Be clear with contract, intention set by client.
- Build capacity for self-referencing and living more inwardly.
- Learn to say no directly and hold appropriate boundaries. Express themselves more honestly and directly in relationships.
- Do not take sides in intrapsychic conflict ESPECIALLY with this survival style: “I want to live authentically, but I fear it.”
- Make special effort not to fix and offer advice which puts pressure on client to meet therapist’s agenda. Also **safeguards against reenactment (seem compliant, then resist)**.
- Manage your distress (if any) with client’s budding autonomy.
- TAKE TIME WITH MOMENTS OF CONGRUENCE: Head and heart are the same!

Moving to resolution



In NARM, we support Autonomy clients to:

- Reclaiming and integrating anger advocating for needs and boundaries clearly and directly.
- **Riding the wave of primary emotion: Grief/anger for the lost time, conditional love, loss of true self.** TAKE TIME WITH SPONTANEOUS EXPRESSION!
- Feels like the pressure is coming from outside, but often is **self-imposed** pressure. Many times it feels like people are judging them when in fact they are judging themselves. This keeps them stuck and dims their light.
- Demonstrating acceptance and compassion for who they are.
- **I can be myself and be in connection!** I can have my autonomy in relationship!
- Can you imagine bringing all your parts to the table? Even the shadowed parts (resistant, pleasing, fear of loss of self, insecurity, etc.)
- Connection deepens with conflict, not in spite of it. Can I bring my full self (what makes me me) into relationship?


Favorite Defenses-
Passive aggressive, projecting, fantasizing, pleasing, avoidant, withdraw, pressuring self
Abandonment (Attachment)- Inhibitory- Shame/Anxiety
Autonomy survival style moment by moment tracking
Authentic/spontaneous expression, boundaries, Intimacy

Deconstructing a specific experience

Orient client to a specific event emblematic of broader pattern to access deeper dynamics, unresolved emotions and limiting identifications.

Pay attention to moments of connection and disconnection. Help clients have moments of direct experience rather than their reactions/old strategies.

Example: Female client feels overwhelmed at work and feels that she letting people down (high stress).

Initially reports stomach dropping, tightness in chest, “I’m failing at my job.” I ask her to bring up the image of a face of someone she respects at work.

She immediately starts to cry (a **direct experience**)! Can we slow down with that? Exploring further, she realizes that the pressure and judgment are coming from within herself.

Befriending the Shadow

Reclaiming and integrating all our projected, banished parts.

Negative shadow: Our own disowned parts we condemn/judge in others

Positive shadow: The good qualities in us that we strongly admire/envy in others.

Projected: If you are strongly upset by others'	**Unowned in yourself**
Incompetence	Willingness to experiment
Greed	Self-provision
Approval seeking	Openness to appreciation
Caretaking	Compassion
Demanding	Asking
Impulsiveness	Spontaneity
Being seen and special	Your authentic light

Autonomy Survival Style

Bring to mind a client who might fit the description of the Autonomy Survival Style:

Symptoms: _____

Coping Strategies/Behaviors: _____

Physical Appearance/Mannerisms: _____

Countertransference Feelings/Reactions: _____