

# RECOGNIZE THE PATTERN

A progression from red flags to stronger boundaries

This map follows one possible lived progression: noticing a warning sign, dismissing it, adapting to preserve connection, and gradually losing touch with personal limits. People's experiences differ; these steps are not inevitable, and responsibility for harmful behaviour belongs to the person choosing it.

## 1. RED FLAGS — NOTICE THE WARNING

Something feels unusually intense, rushed, inconsistent, or uncomfortable. A warning sign may be visible, but it can be difficult to know what it means at the time.

Reflection: What did I notice, even if I didn't yet understand it?

## 2. LOVE BOMBING — THE WARNING GETS DISMISSED

Overwhelming attention, praise, promises, or rapid closeness can feel wonderful. In some relationships, that intensity is used to speed up attachment and reduce space for careful judgment. Not every intense beginning is manipulation; look at the wider pattern and respect your own pace.

Reflection: What helped me explain away the concern or move faster than felt right?

## 3. PEOPLE-PLEASING — KEEPING THE CONNECTION

You may start accommodating, smoothing things over, monitoring the other person's mood, or putting your own needs aside to avoid disappointment, conflict, or rejection. People-pleasing can be a learned protective strategy, not a personal failing.

Reflection: What did I do to keep the peace, and what did it cost me?

## 4. WEAK BOUNDARIES — YOUR LIMITS BECOME HARDER TO HOLD

You may find it harder to say no, take time to decide, maintain privacy, or follow through when a limit is ignored. People-pleasing and weak boundaries can reinforce each other, making it harder to respond to the warning signs you noticed earlier.

Reflection: Which limits became difficult to express or maintain?

## 5. THE PAUSE — INTERRUPT THE AUTOMATIC RESPONSE

The pause creates space between pressure and response. Notice internal signals such as tension, dread, resentment, confusion, or an urgent need to agree. You can say, "I need time to think," and decide later when it is safe to do so.

Practice: What is one phrase that would give me room to choose?

## 6. STRONGER BOUNDARIES — CHOOSE AND FOLLOW THROUGH

A stronger boundary is a clear decision about what you will accept and what you will do to protect your time, space, energy, and wellbeing. You can say no without excessive explanation, repeat your limit, and step away when appropriate and safe.

Practice: What is one small boundary I can practise?

**THE ARC** Red flags → Love bombing → People-pleasing → Weak boundaries → The pause → Stronger boundaries

A note of care: this map is for reflection, not self-blame. A warning sign being dismissed or a boundary being difficult to hold does not make someone responsible for another person's manipulation or abuse. If setting a boundary could increase danger, prioritize safety and seek a safer way to respond.