

Client Handout: Understanding Self-Sabotage

What Is Self-Sabotage?

Self-sabotage is when we act in ways that block our own progress, often without realizing it. It's a pattern of behavior where we undermine our own goals, values, or well-being.

Examples:

- Procrastinating even when something matters to us
- Ending healthy relationships out of fear or mistrust
- Talking ourselves out of opportunities
- Being overly self-critical or perfectionistic

Why It Happens:

Self-sabotage is often rooted in:

- Fear of failure or success
- Low self-worth
- Internalized negative beliefs from past experiences
- Desire to feel in control, even if it means staying stuck

Important Truth:

You're not lazy, broken, or unmotivated. Self-sabotage is a protection strategy that may have once helped you cope. The good news is—it can be unlearned.



How to Heal Self-Sabotage:

1. Notice Your Patterns
Track your triggers. When do you tend to sabotage?
2. Get Curious, Not Critical
Ask yourself: “What am I afraid will happen if I succeed?”
3. Talk to the Part of You That’s Afraid
Instead of fighting it, try compassion:
“I see you’re scared. You’re trying to protect me. Thank you, but I’m safe now.”
4. Take Small, Brave Steps
Don’t wait to feel “ready.” Take one small action anyway.
5. Celebrate Progress, Not Perfection
Every moment you choose growth over fear is a win.

You deserve to thrive. You deserve to show up fully.

Healing self-sabotage is not about being perfect, it’s about building trust with yourself, one kind decision at a time.



Self-Sabotage Awareness Worksheet

Name: _____

Date: _____

1. Identify a Recent Example

Think of a time you may have self-sabotaged:

What happened?

What goal or opportunity was involved?

2. What Were You Feeling?

☐ Fear

☐ Guilt

☐ Anxiety

☐ Shame

☐ Overwhelm

☐ Other: _____

Describe the emotions and any physical sensations:

3. What Thoughts Came Up?

Write down any inner dialogue you noticed, below are some common thoughts for those that self-sabotage:

“I’ll probably fail anyway.”

“I don’t deserve this.”

“If I try and mess up, I’ll be humiliated.”

The first step to change is awareness. Asking yourself these questions and being honest about your thoughts and feelings is a great first step. Going to counseling is a good way to begin processing these emotions and getting to the root of the issue of self-sabotaging. You can then break-free from these negative thought patterns that often lead to dysfunction behavior and undesirable results.