



## **BREAKING THE PATTERNS THAT BIND YOU**

**By Yvonne Thomas, Ph.D.**

How often have you or someone else said, “Why do I keep finding myself in an unsatisfying relationship (or job or friendship or...)”? If situations keep repeating themselves in ways that may be different, yet END UP with the SAME NEGATIVE RESULTS for you, this probably ISN'T JUST A COINCIDENCE! Instead, you may actually be engaged in a PATTERN, whether you know it or not. I define “pattern” as when there are at least two incidents that end up with SIMILAR kinds of OUTCOMES.

Frequently, patterns can occur due to having UNRESOLVED issues from one's CHILDHOOD with a key person (usually one or both parents), which tend to play out with other important, NEW people in one's life (i.e., with a significant other, boss, colleague, co-worker, peer, friend, child, etc.). Since a person was ORIGINALLY USED TO having a certain kind of relationship (whether it was healthy or not) in which everyone interacted in certain ways and certain feelings were experienced, one tends to SUBCONCIOUSLY play out these SAME kinds of interactions and feelings with OTHER people to FIX and RESOLVE the original problem. However, one CANNOT actually repair past damage by “working it out” with new people. This isn't effective because you usually CAN'T change someone else to become who you need him/her to be, and even if you actually were able to do so, often you will get BORED or DISINTERESTED in continuing the relationship with the “changed” person because now there is nothing to replay from the past. Also, the ORIGINAL wound is STILL there, and must be dealt with DIRECTLY by experiencing, processing, and working through the thoughts and feelings attached to it to finally have resolution and inner peace.

Patterns can be TRICKY to detect because each of the incidents in the pattern may NOT OCCUR in the same way. For example, a person may have grown up with an alcoholic parent who neglected him or her. As a result, the person may have vowed to never get romantically involved with someone who had a drinking problem. However, that same person may keep having relationships with significant others who ALSO ignore him or her, but due to other reasons. Maybe that person has gotten involved with a workaholic or someone who is “emotionally distant,” etc. Thus, in the end, the original person is STILL BEING NEGLECTED by the significant individual in his or her life.

Patterns can be hard to stop because they tend to have STAYING POWER since one can get “secondary gains” or “benefits” from continuing the pattern (though, typically, these gains or benefits AREN'T healthy). For example, besides the fact that a person can get CONDITIONED to repeating similar kinds of behavior, such behavior can also feel more SAFE, COMFORTABLE, AND NON-THREATENING to him or her than steering away from the pattern and consciously taking a NEW path. Basically, CHANGE in almost any form, even if it is VOLUNTARY, can feel very SCARY AND RISKY for people; thus, it is certainly NOT UNUSUAL that a person may choose to STAY in one's comfort zone or pattern, in spite of its repeated negative outcomes.

Breaking patterns can be a VERY FREEING step a person can take to regain control of one's life and redirect it towards more HEALTHY, HAPPY results. After recognizing if you have a pattern, TRACE it back to where this SAME kind of feeling and outcome first originated. By knowing the ROOT CAUSES of your pattern, you can DIRECTLY go to the pattern's POINT OF ORIGIN and deal with whatever feelings and thoughts are still unresolved and driving the need to keep re-playing this pattern with new people. If you are unable to identify or resolve your pattern or don't feel BRAVE ENOUGH to venture OUT of your pattern, talking to a Psychologist specializing in these areas can be most helpful.

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