

Identifying Maladaptive Patterns

When working with individuals along the borderline spectrum, it is important to get them to recognize their adaptive and maladaptive patterns of behavior. Most individuals have a few adaptive patterns, but their maladaptive patterns tend to be so fixed that using them is second nature and often immediately reinforcing. Such maladaptive patterns can include unhealthy roles, drug and alcohol abuse, and promiscuity. By the time these individuals enter treatment, they are hopefully ready to change these patterns. Benjamin (1996) outlines five categories of responses that can be helpful to use when working with individuals with personality disorders and those along the borderline spectrum. These include the following:

- 1. Facilitating collaboration**
- 2. Facilitating pattern recognition**
- 3. Blocking maladaptive patterns**
- 4. Strengthening the will to give up maladaptive patterns**
- 5. Facilitating new learning**

Next Steps

The Maladaptive Patterns Worksheet is a tool for exploring Categories 2 and 3. The first part of the worksheet is designed to help the client identify his or her maladaptive pattern (#2) and block the maladaptive pattern (#3) by applying a more helpful and adaptive pattern of functioning. Categories 4 and 5 are addressed throughout the remainder of this workbook. For the Maladaptive Patterns worksheet, the client is encouraged to use the adaptive methods of functioning, outlined in the second part of the worksheet, at all times and not only during times of stress or disappointment.

This worksheet is highly useful in treatment as it helps to identify new adaptive patterns that the client is willing to utilize. There are 25 maladaptive patterns and 50 adaptive patterns listed. This is done intentionally to illustrate that there are more positive and adaptive patterns than maladaptive ones from which to choose.

Taken from the *Antisocial, Borderline, Narcissistic, and Histrionic Workbook* by Daniel J. Fox (2015)

Maladaptive Patterns

Directions: The following is a list of the 25 most common maladaptive patterns. Please put a check (✓) next to all that you have engaged in and tend to use after encountering a setback, failure, or other stressful event in your life.

	Compliant surrendering (giving in quietly)
	"Being accepting of the punitive partner/parent"
	Overcompensating
	Being the punitive partner/parent (believing you should be punished for "bad self")
	Being the demanding partner/parent (the "right" way to be is to be perfect)
	Abusing alcohol or recreational drugs
	Using avoidance
	Procrastinating
	Overeating
	Undereating
	Self-injuring
	Spending excessively
	Engaging in unprotected or impulsive sexual behavior
	Withdrawing from positive influences
	Oversleeping
	Undersleeping

	Filling up every minute of the day to avoid facing problems
	Taking out your stress on others (lashing out, angry outbursts, physical violence)
	Beating yourself up mentally
	Misusing prescription drugs, not taking them as prescribed/instructed
	Denying the problem exists
	Engaging in addictive behaviors, such as gambling, internet addiction, sexual addiction, thrill seeking or taking unnecessary risks, or any activity done to excess
	Burning bridges, as in cutting off friendships and other relationships, quitting jobs, and moving frequently
	Denying yourself playtime, rest, social interaction, fun, and other healthy human needs
	Dissociating (detaching from the present to avoid emotional distress)

Many people feel that they get a great benefit out of their maladaptive pattern(s); otherwise, they would not engage in it/them. Can you describe what you get out of using your maladaptive pattern(s)?

Do you want to give up your maladaptive pattern(s)? Yes No

If you want to give up your maladaptive pattern(s), which of the following 50 adaptive patterns could you use instead? (Put a check [✓] next to all that apply.)

	Exercise (e.g., running, walking)		Spending time with friends
	Writing (poetry, stories, journal)		Scribbling/doodling
	Do a word search or crossword puzzle		Watching a favorite TV show or movie
	Posting on Internet forums and answering others' posts		Playing a musical instrument
	Painting your nails, doing your make-up or hair		Singing
	Cloud or sky watching		Hitting a punching bag

Covering yourself with Band-Aids where you want to cut	Letting yourself cry
Taking a nap	Taking a hot shower or relaxing bath
Playing with a pet	Going shopping
Cleaning something	Knitting or sewing
Reading a good book	Listening to music
Meditating	Using aromatherapy (candle, lotion, room spray)
Going somewhere public	Playing video/computer games
Ripping paper into tiny pieces	Playing basketball or shooting hoops
Baking cookies	Alphabetizing your music/DVDs/books
Painting or drawing	Writing a letter or an email (whether or not to send)
Hugging a pillow or stuffed animal	Studying something up close, like a rock or your hand
Dancing	Searching online for new songs/artists
Teaching your pet a new trick	Moving EVERYTHING in your room to a new spot
Getting together with friends	Playing with modeling clay or Play-Doh
Playing Frisbee, soccer, or catch	Doing yoga
Completing something you've been putting off	"Shopping" online (without buying anything)
Taking up a new hobby	Looking up recipes, cooking a meal
Looking at pretty things like flowers or art	Creating or building something
Praying	Making a list of blessings in your life

Remember to use these adaptive patterns as much as you can and not just under stressful circumstances. Make them a part of your life so that when you do encounter stress you have more positives “to fall back on.”