



Inner Meridian *Life Coaching*

What Your Inner Compass Is Trying To Tell You

A gentle guide to understanding the
patterns that may be keeping you stuck.

Part 3: Understand



The Inner Meridian Compass Journey

Notice - Reflect - Understand - Realign



Find your way back to yourself



Welcome

You have noticed. You have reflected. Now it is time to understand.

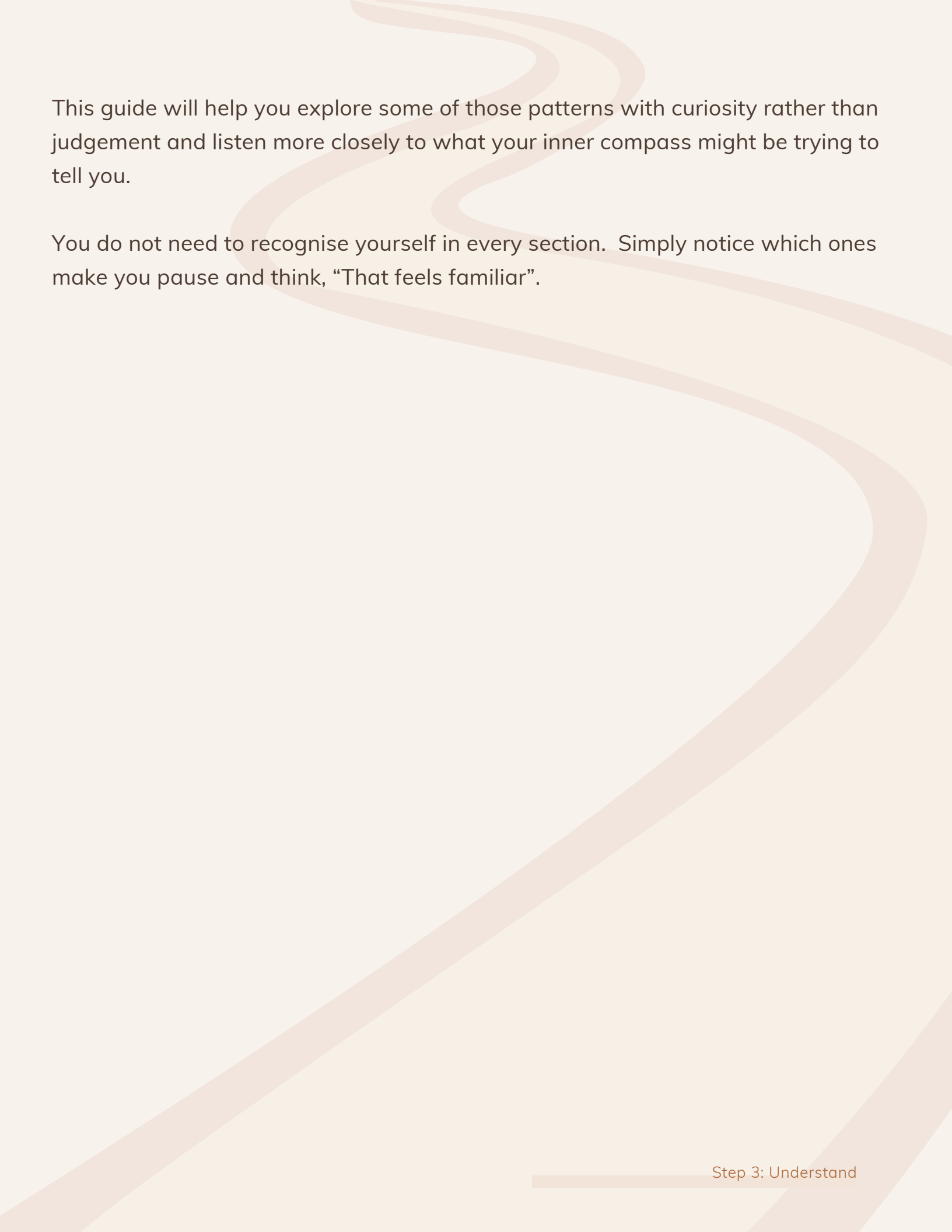
By now, you may have started to notice that something in your life no longer feels quite right. You may also have begun reconnecting with what you need, value and want.

But awareness can bring another question:

Why do I keep doing the things that leave me exhausted, disconnected or stuck?

Perhaps you keep saying “yes” when you mean “no”. Maybe you put impossible pressure on yourself, overthink every decision or struggle to prioritise your own needs.

These patterns are not signs that you are weak, difficult or failing. Most developed because they once helped you feel safe, accepted, prepared or in control.



This guide will help you explore some of those patterns with curiosity rather than judgement and listen more closely to what your inner compass might be trying to tell you.

You do not need to recognise yourself in every section. Simply notice which ones make you pause and think, “That feels familiar”.

How to use this workbook

This is not a checklist or personality assessment. You do not need to label yourself or work through every page in one sitting.

As you read, notice:

- which patterns feel familiar
- which examples create a strong emotional response
- which sections you want to dismiss or skip
- which words or ideas keep returning
- where you feel relief at finally having language for an experience

You may want to highlight phrases, make notes or return to the reflection questions later.

The aim is not to judge your behaviour. It is to understand what it may have been trying to do for you.

*Understanding a pattern is not the same as excusing it.
It is the first step towards choosing differently.*





The pattern beneath the pattern

What looks like a problem may once have been a solution.

Many behaviours that frustrate us began as ways of coping. Some are listed below and are explored in more detail in this guide.

Behaviour	What may be underneath
People-pleasing	A need for safety, acceptance or connection
Perfectionism	Fear of criticism, failure or being exposed
Overthinking	An attempt to prevent mistakes or uncertainty
Overworking	A belief that worth must be earned
Avoidance	Overwhelm, fear or insufficient capacity
Difficulty resting	Guilt, hyper-vigilance or fear of falling behind
Masking	A need to fit in, stay safe or avoid rejection

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A pattern can protect you and restrict you at the same time

1 People-pleasing

You are highly attuned to what everyone else needs, but often disconnected from what you need.

What it can look like

- Saying “yes” automatically
- over-explaining
- avoiding difficult conversations
- feeling responsible for other people’s emotions

What may be underneath it

People-pleasing is often less about wanting everyone to like you and more about wanting to feel safe, accepted or free from conflict.

You may have learned that being easy, helpful or agreeable earned approval or that expressing your needs created tension.



Your compass may be saying...

My needs matter too. Connection should not require me to disappear.

“Where am I maintaining harmony for everyone else at the expense of honesty with myself?”

2 Perfectionism

You may appear capable and conscientious whilst privately feeling that nothing you ever do is quite enough.

What it can look like

- delaying tasks because you cannot do them perfectly
- repeatedly checking or re-writing
- avoiding unfamiliar activities
- finding praise difficult to accept
- focusing on small mistakes instead of overall success
- setting standards you would never accept from others

What may be underneath it

Perfectionism often grows from fear rather than ambition.

It may try to protect you from criticism, embarrassment, rejection or the possibility of discovering that your best is not enough.



Your compass may be saying...

I want permission to be human, visible and still worthy

“What might become possible if “good enough” were genuinely enough?”

3 Overthinking

You keep analysing because you believe enough thinking will eventually remove all risk.

What it can look like

- replaying conversations
- researching beyond what is useful
- imagining every possible outcome
- asking several people for reassurance
- struggling with relatively small decisions
- delaying action until you feel completely sure
- feeling mentally exhausted but no closer to clarity

What may be underneath it

Overthinking often tries to protect you from regret, uncertainty, mistakes or disapproval.



Your compass may be saying...

I need trust, not another hundred possible scenarios

“What do I already know beneath all the noise?”

4 Comparison

You measure your life against everyone else's and may struggle to hear your own direction because you're always checking where everyone else appears to be going.

What it can look like

- feeling behind
- judging your timeline
- comparing careers, homes, relationships or appearance
- assuming others feel more confident than you
- changing your goals after seeing someone else's success
- dismissing your progress because someone else has achieved more

What may be underneath it

Comparison can reflect uncertainty about your own values and direction.

When your internal compass feels faint, external milestones become the easiest way to measure whether you are doing life “correctly”.



Your compass may be saying...

Their path is not evidence that mine is wrong.

“*What would success look like if no-one else could see or judge it?*”

5 Over-responsibility

You feel responsible not only for your own actions, but for everyone else's wellbeing, reactions and outcomes. You are carrying more than is yours.

What it can look like

- fixing problems before anyone asks
- anticipating others' needs
- feeling guilty when someone is disappointed
- taking over because it feels easier
- struggling to delegate
- believing things will fall apart without you
- feeling indispensable and resentful at the same time

What may be underneath it

Over-responsibility can grow from unpredictability, family roles, care-giving expectations or the belief that your value lies in being useful. It can also create a sense of control when uncertainty feels uncomfortable.



Your compass may be saying...

Supporting others does not require carrying everything for them

“What am I taking responsibility for that does not fully belong to me?”

6 Ignoring your own needs

You often notice your own needs only when they become impossible to ignore.

What it can look like

- skipping meals or breaks
- working through exhaustion
- dismissing sensory discomfort
- postponing medical or emotional support
- needing to reach crisis point before resting
- telling yourself other people have it harder
- believing needs are inconveniences rather than information

What may be underneath it

You may have learned that being capable means coping without support or that your needs are excessive, inconvenient or less important than everyone else's.

Some people also find it genuinely difficult to notice internal signals until those signals become intense.



Your compass may be saying...

My needs are not obstacles. They are information about how I function best.

Which need have I been asking myself to outgrow, suppress or earn the right to meet?

7 Overworking and constant busyness

Rest feels uncomfortable because part of you believes you should always be doing something useful.

What it can look like

- filling every available space
- feeling guilty when resting
- equating productivity with goodness
- taking on more than you have capacity for
- struggling to enjoy activities without an outcome
- becoming anxious when life slows down
- reaching exhaustion and then criticising yourself for needing recovery

What may be underneath it

Busyness can provide validation, distraction, structure or protection from uncomfortable feelings.

You may have absorbed the message that worth is earned through achievement, helpfulness or endurance.



Your compass may be saying...

My value does not disappear when I stop producing

“Who am I afraid I might become if I stopped proving myself?”

8 Avoidance and procrastination

You know what needs doing, but starting feels strangely difficult.

What it can look like

- repeatedly delaying
- becoming busy with less important tasks
- waiting for motivation
- feeling paralysed by large or unclear tasks
- avoiding emails, decisions or conversations
- doing everything at the last minute
- calling yourself lazy despite feeling anxious about the task

What may be underneath it

Avoidance can come from fear, overwhelm, low energy, perfectionism, unclear expectations or difficulty initiating tasks.

It's often a sign that something about the task or environment is not working - not proof of poor character.



Your compass may be saying...

I need clarity, support, safety or a smaller first step - not more self-criticism

“What might this avoidance be protecting me from or telling me I need?”

9 Masking and shape-shifting

You adapt so quickly to other people that you sometimes struggle to know which version is really you.

What it can look like

- copying other people's expressions or mannerisms
- monitoring how much you talk and what you talk about
- hiding enthusiasm, confusion or discomfort
- needing significant recovery after social situations
- feeling different in every group
- wondering whether people would like the "real" you

What may be underneath it

Most people adapt their behaviour to different situations. However, for some, this becomes a constant and exhausting form of self-monitoring.

Masking may develop to avoid rejection, criticism, exclusion or misunderstanding. It is particularly common amongst people whose differences were overlooked or discouraged.



Your compass may be saying...

I want relationships and environments where I do not have to perform to belong

“Where do I feel safest being unedited?”

10 Living in cycles of overwhelm and recovery

You seem to cope until, suddenly, you can't, and then wonder why you didn't see it coming.

What it can look like

- periods of intense productivity followed by exhaustion
- managing well publicly but collapsing at home
- repeatedly taking on too much
- needing long recovery after ordinary demands
- becoming more sensitive, tearful or irritable
- withdrawing from people and responsibilities
- promising yourself that next time you will be more disciplined

What may be underneath it

This cycle can occur when your visible performance does not reflect the energy it costs to you.

It may also suggest that your workload, sensory environment, expectations or coping strategies are not sustainable.



Your compass may be saying...

The fact that I can force myself through something doesn't mean it's sustainable for me.

“What are the earliest signs that I’m approaching my limit?”



Every pattern is trying to do something for you

Behaviour	It may be trying to protect me from...	It may be trying to help me gain...
People-pleasing	Conflict or rejection	Belonging
Perfectionism	Criticism or shame	Approval or safety
Overthinking	Mistakes or uncertainty	Control
Overworking	Feeling inadequate	Worth or recognition
Avoidance	Failure or overwhelm	Relief
Masking	Exclusion or misunderstanding	Acceptance



A gentler response

Our own internal voice can be brutal. By reframing what it's saying, it can help us gain more curiosity and ask better questions that help us gain more clarity.

Instead of...	Try asking...
Why am I like this?	What might this pattern be trying to do for me?
Why can everyone else cope?	What is this costing me that others might not see?
I need to try harder	What support, clarity or adjustment do I need?
I am too sensitive	What information is my response giving me?
I should be over this by now	What still needs understanding or care?
I always ruin things	What happens before this pattern appears?

Curiosity creates space for change. Shame usually makes the pattern tighter.



Patterns often travel together

You may start to recognise a cycle rather than a single pattern - how some of these behaviours feed each other to create a downward spiral.

The problem is rarely that you simply need more discipline.

The deeper invitation may be to explore boundaries, capacity, self-worth, support and the expectations you are carrying.

On the next page, take some time to identify the behaviours that resonated with you in this document and how some of them might link.

Remember - there's no right or wrong. Just get curious and explore what comes up.



My reflections



What is your inner compass pointing towards?

Use the questions below to reflect on everything you've taken from this guide.

The patterns I recognised most strongly were...

The situations that tend to trigger them are...

These patterns may be trying to protect me from...

The cost of continuing in the same way is...

What I may actually need is...

One thing I want to understand more deeply is...



When self-help advice doesn't seem to work

What if the problem is not a lack of effort?

You may have already tried setting better routines, becoming more disciplined, using planners, practicing positive thinking or promising yourself that things will be different next week.

Some of these approaches help. Sometimes they fail because they do not address what is underneath the pattern.

You may be dealing with:

- limited emotional or physical capacity
- an environment that does not suit your needs
- fear or shame
- chronic stress
- executive function difficulties
- sensory overload
- expectations that are unrealistic for you
- an unrecognised difference in how your brain processes the world

The answer may not be to try harder. It may be to understand yourself more accurately.

“A strategy can be excellent and still be wrong for you



Could there be another layer?

For some women, these patterns are part of a bigger story

People-pleasing, perfectionism, overwhelm, difficulty resting and feeling “different” can affect anyone.

But for some women and AFAB people, these experiences are also connected to previously unrecognised neurodiversity, such as autism, ADHD or both - AuDHD.

They may have spent years:

- working hard to appear organised or socially confident
- hiding confusion, sensory discomfort or emotional intensity
- wondering why everyday tasks require so much effort
- moving between intense productivity and exhaustion
- being described as capable but inconsistent
- feeling as though everyone else received a rulebook they somehow missed

*“This does not mean that recognising these experiences makes you neurodivergent. It simply means neurodivergence may be one avenue worth exploring.**

Download “Could neurodivergence be part of my story?”

*This guide cannot tell you whether you are neurodivergent and coaching is not a diagnostic service.



Your next compass bearing



Route 1: ready to talk?

If you'd like a dedicated space to explore these questions with support, curiosity and accountability, coaching can help.

Book a free Discovery call



Route 2: neurodivergence pathway

If you want to explore anything associated with neurodivergence, neurodiversity-informed coaching can give you space to explore these experiences in a way that works with your brain

Book a free Discovery Call

Download "Could neurodivergence be part of my story?"



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Find your way back to yourself