

Managing the Pattern

How to operate strategically when
you cannot yet leave

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You know what they are. You cannot leave yet. This is the guide for the interim.

You may be planning an exit that takes months. You may be trapped in a court process that takes years. You may work alongside them with no prospect of either of you leaving. You may be co-parenting through an arrangement you cannot change. Whatever the reason, you need to manage the pattern – not just survive it but operate strategically within it – whilst protecting yourself, your resources and your sanity.

This is not about fixing them. They will not change. This is about understanding their operating system well enough to predict their moves, protect your position and get what you need from the situation.

1. Their Operating System

The extraction pattern runs on three things: **supply** (your emotional reaction – positive or negative, it doesn't matter), **control** (the ability to direct your behaviour, your emotions, your decisions) and **image** (how they appear to others). Everything they do serves at least one of these. Once you see the operating system, their behaviour becomes predictable. And predictable can be managed.

Supply: they need your reaction. Anger works. Tears work. Fear works. Even your exhaustion works. The only thing that doesn't work is nothing. Grey rock deprives them of supply. But sometimes you need to give them something – a carefully measured reaction that keeps them satisfied without costing you. A nod. A brief acknowledgement. Enough to prevent escalation, not enough to feed the cycle.

Control: they need to believe they are directing events. The most effective management strategy is letting them believe they are in control whilst you quietly secure what matters. Present your needs as their ideas. Frame your boundaries as things that serve them. "I think it would look really good for you if we handled it this way." They care about how things look. Use that.

Image: their public presentation is sacred. They will do almost anything to protect it. This is your strongest lever. Anything that threatens how they appear to people they want to impress will produce compliance faster than any argument. You don't need to threaten. You need to make the outcome you want look like the outcome that protects their image.

2. The Tactical Toolkit

Give them a win that doesn't matter

The extraction pattern cannot concede. Every point is existential. Use this. Identify what actually matters to you (the children's safety, the financial settlement, the client relationship, the project outcome) and what doesn't (the wording, the timing of a minor detail, who gets the visible credit). Concede the unimportant with apparent reluctance. Let them feel they won. Secure what matters while they are celebrating.

In court: concede a minor scheduling point. They fixate on the “win.” You secure the prohibited steps order.

In business: let them present the strategy to the board. You retain operational control.

At home: agree on the holiday destination. You have already secured the financial documents.

Let them talk

The extraction-wired cannot resist performing. In any setting where they have an audience – court, a meeting, mediation, a family gathering – open-ended questions produce more than closed ones. They will embellish. They will denigrate others. They will volunteer information they did not intend to share. They will contradict things they said last month. Every word is recorded – by the court, by the minutes, by your diary.

The counterintuitive insight from litigation psychology: **be deferential, not aggressive.** Flattery works because they assume it is genuine. Ask them to explain. Ask them to compare themselves to others. They cannot resist. The more they talk, the more material they produce for their own contradiction.

Lock them into a narrative

Let them tell their version early – to friends, to CAFCASS, to the mediator, in their position statement, on social media. They will commit to a story because the story serves their image. Do not correct it immediately. Let it solidify. Your documented evidence then contradicts a fixed narrative, which is far more damaging than contradicting a flexible one. A person who says “that never happened” and then faces a timestamped WhatsApp proving it did – that is evidence the court can use.

Use their predictability

The extraction cycle repeats: assessment, investment, extraction, maintenance, discard. If you know the cycle, you can anticipate what comes next. When you set a boundary, they will escalate – the extinction burst. When they sense you are leaving, the Hoover arrives. When the Hoover fails, the smear campaign begins. Each of these is predictable and each can be prepared for.

Prepare before you act. Before you file, before you leave, before you set a boundary – document, secure finances, brief your coalition, anticipate the response. The pattern will react. If you have prepared, the reaction becomes evidence rather than crisis.

3. Managing in Specific Situations

While you are still living together

This is the most dangerous phase and the least documented. You have woken up but cannot act yet. The rules: do not announce your recognition. Do not change your routine suddenly – they will notice emotional withdrawal first, schedule changes last. Restrict information in order: stop sharing emotions first, then goals, then opinions, then who you are confiding in, then finances, then logistics. Build your exit plan in silence. Legal advice first (they don't know). Financial preparation second. Documents third. Coalition fourth. Timeline fifth.

Monitor their testing. When the pattern senses a shift, it probes: small boundary violations, escalating put-downs, sudden plan changes, emotional outbursts gauging whether intimidation still works. Respond as you always have. Maintain the performance. The performance is your protection until you are ready.

In court proceedings

The court process is the extractor's stage. But the stage has rules they cannot break without consequence. Use the rules. Document every breach of court orders – they will breach, because they believe rules apply to others. Prepare for the breach before it happens. Time your applications for when they are distracted, overconfident or between solicitors (they frequently sack lawyers – the information asymmetry is exploitable). Let them commit to positions in their statement that your evidence contradicts.

At work

If you cannot leave and cannot remove them, you manage. Document everything in the HR observation log. Build your coalition quietly – the other people who see it. Communicate in writing. In meetings, ask clarifying questions that create a record: "Just to confirm – you're saying that [x]?" Follow up with an email: "As discussed, you confirmed [x]." Create an evidence trail of commitments they cannot later deny.

Manage upwards: if they are your manager, make your work visible to their superiors without appearing to go around them. Copy the right people on emails. Volunteer for cross-team projects. Build a reputation outside their control.

In a business partnership

Get independent legal and financial advice before they know you are looking. Understand the partnership agreement, the articles, the accounts. Secure your access to financial records. If they control the accounts, that is the extraction architecture – map it. Consider whether buying them out is cheaper than the ongoing extraction. Every month you delay while hoping they will change is a month of resources transferred.

With a parent you cannot yet cut off

Grey rock at every interaction. Share nothing of substance. Manage visits: public settings, fixed duration, your transport so you can leave. When they provoke, give a measured response that satisfies their need for a reaction without costing you: “You might be right.” “I’ll think about that.” They need to feel heard. You don’t need to actually engage. Protect your children from the dynamic even if you cannot yet protect yourself.

4. When You Need Something from Them

Negotiating with someone who doesn't negotiate in good faith requires a different approach from normal negotiation. You cannot appeal to fairness – they don't process fairness. You cannot appeal to the children's interests – the children are leverage, not motivation. You work with the operating system, not against it.

Frame it as their idea. “I was thinking about what you said last week, and you were right – it would be better if we did [the thing you want].” Attribution costs you nothing. The outcome is what matters.

Frame it as serving their image. “I think the judge would be really impressed if you proposed [the thing you want].” “I think the board would see real leadership if you suggested [the outcome you need].” They care about how they appear. Let that do the work.

Make compliance easy and resistance expensive. Structure your proposals so that agreeing is simple and refusing looks unreasonable. Document the proposal in writing. If they refuse, the refusal is on record. In court, a documented history of reasonable proposals met with unreasonable refusals is powerful evidence.

Trade, don't demand. “If you agree to [x], I'm happy to agree to [y].” Give them something they want (that doesn't matter to you) in exchange for something you need. They will take the deal if they feel they won.

Use their need to perform. In any setting with an audience – mediation, a meeting, a family event – they will be on their best behaviour because their image demands it. Raise the thing you need in that setting. They are more likely to agree when witnesses are present because refusing would damage the performance.

The principle underneath

You are not manipulating. You are communicating in a language the other person's operating system can process. You tried fairness, honesty and direct requests – they didn't work because the pattern doesn't process them. This is architectural. You are building a Plimsoll line around your own interests using the materials available. Fierce protection with maintained dignity. Always.

5. Buying Time

If you are preparing an exit – from a relationship, a business, a living situation – you may need to keep the pattern occupied whilst you build your position.

Feed the image. A narcissist who feels admired, successful and in control is a narcissist who is not watching you closely. Validate their latest achievement. Show interest in their project. Ask their opinion on something unrelated to your exit plan. This is not dishonesty. It is strategic allocation of their attention.

Give them a project. The extraction-wired are most dangerous when they are bored. A new initiative at work, a renovation plan, a social event to organise – something that absorbs their energy and attention. Whilst they are occupied, you are preparing.

Avoid triggering narcissistic injury. The highest-risk moments are when the pattern feels disrespected, ignored or challenged. During your preparation period, avoid confrontation on any front. This is not capitulation. It is timing. You will act when you are ready, not when they provoke you into acting before you are prepared.

Watch for their distractions. A new relationship, a work crisis, a health concern, a holiday – any period when their attention is elsewhere is a window for you. File the application when they are distracted. Move the documents when they are away. Secure the account when their attention is on something else.

6. The Line You Do Not Cross

This guide teaches you to work with the pattern's operating system. It does not teach you to become the pattern. The distinction matters.

You are protecting yourself. Not punishing them. You are securing your interests. Not destroying theirs. You are managing a situation you did not create. Not becoming someone who creates situations.

The diagnostic still applies. Recognition arrives with grief. Weaponisation arrives with triumph. If you find yourself enjoying the management – if the tactical advantage feels like power rather than protection – stop. That is the line. You are using the framework to build architecture around yourself, not to build a cage around them.

Fierce protection with maintained dignity. That is the principle. It protects you from becoming what you oppose. And it protects the framework from being weaponised.

Contain. Don't blame. Even when you could. Especially when you could.

Where to go next

If you are in immediate danger: call 999 or the National Domestic Abuse Helpline on 0808 2000 247 (24 hours, free).

Free guides at www.trueregard.com: The Good Faith Problem · Recognising Covert Narcissism · Waking Up · What Is Happening to You · Family Court Survival Guide · Personal Protection Toolkit · Professional Toolkits.

The full framework: *The Extraction Pattern* and *The Capture: How They Stole America* by Vaughan Smith. www.trueregard.com/the-books.

Share this. The pattern survives through isolation. Every copy shared rebuilds the grandmother.

THE EXTRACTION PATTERN

Vaughan Smith

The five per cent who design extraction. The ninety-five per cent who live inside it. The architecture that could contain it.

THE CAPTURE

Vaughan Smith

How They Stole America. The extraction pattern captured democracy, economy, healthcare, media and accountability – domain by domain.

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