

THE EXTRACTION PATTERN

Waking Up

What to do when you recognise
the extraction pattern in your life

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A companion guide to The Extraction Pattern

You have just understood something that changes everything.

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Maybe it came slowly – months of doubt crystallising into a sentence you can't unhear. Maybe it came all at once – something they said, something you read, a pattern suddenly visible like a shape emerging from static. However it arrived, you now see what you are dealing with.

This moment is the most important and the most dangerous in the entire process. Important because recognition is where protection begins. Dangerous because the pattern will detect the shift in you before you are ready, and it will respond.

This guide is for right now. Not next month. Now. It covers the first decisions you need to make, the mistakes most people make in the first weeks, and the realistic assessment of your options depending on your situation. It is direct because you need direct. There will be time for nuance later. Right now you need a map.

1. The First Rule: Don't Announce

The single most common mistake people make in the first days of recognition is telling the person they have recognised. Confronting them with the vocabulary. Naming the pattern to their face. Sending the article, the book passage, the diagnostic checklist.

Do not do this.

You will not produce insight. You will produce DARVO – deny, attack, reverse victim and offender. They will deny everything. They will attack you for saying it. Then they will claim that you are the narcissist, you are the abuser, you are the one who needs help. The vocabulary you have just learned will be turned against you within the hour.

Worse: you will have shown them your hand. They now know you see. The pattern will adapt. Evidence will be destroyed. Narratives will be seeded with friends, family, colleagues. By the time you are ready to act, the ground will have shifted underneath you.

Recognition is your advantage. Silence protects it. Use the time to prepare, to document, to build your coalition, to understand your options. Act from strength, not from the shock of discovery.

2. Talk to Your GP

One of the first things you should do – and one of the things nobody tells you to do – is speak to your GP. Not because you are ill. Because a medical record of what you are experiencing creates evidence that begins before legal proceedings, and evidence that predates proceedings carries weight.

Say this: *“I need to tell you that I am experiencing domestic abuse and coercive control at home, and it is affecting my mental and physical health. I would like this recorded in my medical notes.”* Then describe your symptoms using clinical language: persistent anxiety, hypervigilance, difficulty sleeping, intrusive thoughts, panic attacks. Ask them to note that, in their professional judgement,

your condition is consistent with being a victim of domestic abuse. That sentence – written by a doctor – can later support a legal aid application and a mediation exemption.

Critical: hide it from the NHS App

Since November 2022, new GP entries are visible to patients through the NHS App. If the abuser could coerce you into showing your records, ask the GP to redact domestic abuse entries from your online record view. Your GP can hide specific entries – they remain visible to clinicians but not through the app.

3. Where Are You? Assess Your Situation

The extraction pattern appears across every kind of relationship. What you do next depends on where you are. A six-month relationship and a thirty-year marriage require different responses. A difficult colleague and a business partner who controls the accounts require different timescales. Be honest about your situation.

A romantic relationship (early)

If the relationship is less than two years old and you have no shared children, property or finances – leave. Cleanly, quickly, without detailed explanation. You do not owe a diagnosis. You owe yourself a future. The longer you stay, the deeper the hooks. Every month you delay costs you months of recovery. The improvement you are hoping for is the maintenance phase. It is recalibration, not change.

A long-term relationship or marriage

Shared children. Shared property. Shared decades. Leaving is not a single decision – it is a project that requires planning, legal advice and financial preparation. Do not rush it. Do not announce it. Begin documenting. Secure your financial information. Understand your legal position before you move. A solicitor who understands coercive control is essential – most family lawyers do not. Ask specifically. If they look blank when you describe the pattern, find a different solicitor.

A parent or sibling

You cannot divorce a parent. You cannot fire a sibling. But you can graduate your contact. Grey rock – becoming boring, unrewarding, emotionally flat – is often the most realistic first response with family. Low contact – structured interactions on your terms, with documented boundaries – is the next step. No contact is available to you and it is not a failure. Some family relationships cannot be made safe. Accepting that is not giving up. It is recognising architecture.

A business partner

If they control the finances, you are in danger. Get independent legal and financial advice immediately – before they know you are looking. Selling the business, dissolving the partnership or buying them out may all cost less than the ongoing extraction. Every month you delay while hoping they will change is a month of resources transferred. Treat it as a financial decision, not an emotional one. The numbers will tell you what your feelings cannot.

A colleague or employer

Document everything. Build your coalition quietly – find the other people who see it. Update your CV. If the extractor is your manager and HR is not independent, your options inside the organisation may be limited. Sometimes the realistic answer is to leave. That is not defeat. That is recognising that the architecture is captured and your energy is better spent elsewhere.

An employee

If you manage someone with the extraction pattern, you need HR and legal support before you act. Document the pattern meticulously. Follow process to the letter – because they will exploit any procedural gap. The extraction-wired are often superb at employment tribunals. Their charm works on judges. Your documentation is your protection.

4. Why Couples Therapy Is Dangerous

This will be the most counterintuitive thing in this guide. Your instinct will be to fix the relationship. A therapist seems like the obvious answer. Someone neutral who can help you both see clearly.

Couples therapy with someone who has the extraction pattern is not just ineffective. It is dangerous.

Here is why. The extraction-wired have cold empathy – the ability to read other people’s emotions with precision without feeling them. A therapy session is an intelligence-gathering operation. Every vulnerability you reveal becomes ammunition. Every fear you name becomes a lever. The therapist, trained to be neutral, often cannot distinguish between two people who are both hurting and one person who is performing hurt whilst the other is drowning in it.

Worse: the extraction-wired are often magnificent in therapeutic settings. Charming. Insightful. Apparently willing to change. The therapist may end up believing that you are the difficult one. You will leave sessions feeling more confused, more guilty, more certain that the problem is you. That confusion is not a side effect. It is the function.

What to do instead

Get your own therapist. Individual therapy with someone who understands extraction patterns, coercive control and narcissistic abuse. Ask specifically: “Do you have experience working with clients who have experienced covert narcissistic abuse?” If they hesitate or redirect to “it takes two to tango,” find someone else. The right therapist will not need you to prove what you are experiencing. They will recognise it.

5. What Happens When You Tell People

You will need support. You cannot do this alone. But you need to be prepared for what happens when you start telling people, because the responses will sort themselves into patterns that are predictable and sometimes painful.

The people who see it immediately

They were waiting for you to say it. They saw it before you did but didn’t know how to raise it. These are your coalition. Hold them close. In the book’s framework, **the grandmother** is the figure who held the long memory of the village – not necessarily a literal grandmother, but someone who had been watching for decades, who could validate your perception when you doubted yourself. She is the book’s shorthand for community memory that confirmed your doubt before the pattern could talk you out of it. These people who see it immediately – they are your grandmother rebuilt.

The people who don’t believe you

The extractor’s public face is different from their private one. The people who know them socially, who see the charm and the apparent vulnerability, will struggle to reconcile your account with their experience. Some will think you are exaggerating. Some will actively defend the extractor. This is not disloyalty. It is the pattern working as designed. Don’t waste energy trying to convince them. Focus on the people who can see.

The people who are also being extracted from

You may discover you are not the only one. Former partners, former colleagues, former friends – people who went through the same cycle before you. Their accounts will validate yours. This is why triangulation exists in the toolkit: to prevent exactly this comparison of notes.

The people who withdraw

Some people will distance themselves from you. Not because they don't believe you but because your situation frightens them. It holds up a mirror. It asks questions they don't want to answer about their own relationships. Let them go. They may return later, when they are ready.

The people who make it about themselves

Someone will tell you their own story, at length, when you needed them to listen to yours. This is not extraction. This is human. They are processing. Be patient with them if you can. But protect your energy. You do not have unlimited reserves right now.

A small, solid coalition is worth more than a large, uncertain one. Three people who see clearly are better than thirty who half-believe you.

6. The Grief Nobody Warns You About

Recognition produces a grief that doesn't fit any category most people understand. It is not the grief of a death, though it resembles it. It is not the grief of a breakup, though it includes that. It is the grief of discovering that reality was not what you believed it was.

You are grieving the relationship you thought you had. The person you thought you knew. The future you thought you were building. None of those were real – or rather, they were real to you and performed by them. The love you felt was genuine. The love you received was functional.

You are grieving your own judgement. How did I not see? How did I let this happen? How many years did I lose? The self-recrimination is savage and it is wrong. You didn't see because the pattern evolved specifically to be invisible to your good faith. Your trust was exploited because trust is a strength, not a weakness. Your empathy was targeted because empathy is the threat the pattern needed to neutralise.

You are grieving the time. Six months. Five years. Thirty years. However long it was, it is gone and the temptation to add it to the cost – to make yourself feel worse about the time lost – is powerful and counterproductive. The time is spent. The question is what you do with the time that remains.

This grief comes in waves. You will think you are past it and it will return – triggered by a photograph, a song, a date, a smell. Each wave is shorter and less devastating than the last, but the process takes longer than you want it to. Months. Sometimes years. That is normal. That is recovery, not failure.

The diagnostic still applies

If you are feeling this grief – the devastation, the self-questioning, the sense that your world has been dismantled – that is the proof your good faith is intact. Recognition arrives with grief. Weaponisation arrives with triumph. Your pain is evidence that you are not the pattern.

7. Negotiating the Route Out

However the relationship is structured – romantic, familial, professional – there are practical steps that apply in every case.

Secure your finances

Before anything else. If they have access to your accounts, your savings, your credit, understand the position. Get bank statements. Check what is jointly held. If you depend on them financially, work out what you need to become independent – and start building towards it quietly. Financial dependence is one of the most effective containment tools the pattern uses. Breaking it is your first priority.

Secure your documents

Passport. Birth certificates. Marriage certificate. Property deeds. Insurance documents. Medical records. Employment contracts. Anything you would need if you had to leave with nothing else. Copy them. Store copies somewhere they cannot reach – a trusted friend, a solicitor, a safety deposit box. Do this first, do this quietly.

Get legal advice early

Not when you are ready to leave. Now. Understanding your legal position changes what feels possible. Many people stay longer than they need to because they believe leaving will cost them everything. Often the legal reality is better than the fear. Sometimes it is worse. Either way, you need to know.

Document from today

The pattern journal. Thirty seconds per entry. Date, person, physical response, pattern type, brief detail. Email yourself after important interactions. Screenshot messages before they can be deleted. Build the evidence base from the moment of recognition. What came before is harder to recover. What comes from today is yours.

Set a timeline

Not a deadline – a timeline. How long do you need to become financially independent? To get legal advice? To find somewhere to live? To build your coalition? Be realistic, not optimistic. Then work to the timeline. A plan defeats the paralysis that recognition often produces. You don't need to leave tomorrow. You need to be leaving.

**The sooner you are realistic about where you are, the sooner you start recovering.
Hope is not a strategy. Architecture is.**

The guardianship trap – read this now

If you die during proceedings and the other parent has parental responsibility, they automatically take the children – regardless of unproven abuse. The only exception: if you have a Child Arrangements Order stating the children live with you AND you have named a testamentary guardian in your will. Make or update your will immediately. Name a guardian. If you die intestate while separated but not divorced, your estranged spouse still inherits under intestacy rules.

Digital safety – do this today

If you share an Apple ID, they can see all your messages, location, photos and browsing. Create a new Apple ID with a new email on a safe device. Check your phone for tracking apps (battery draining fast, excessive data use, device getting hot). Check your car for AirTags (under seats, wheel arches, behind bumpers). Change passwords in this order: email first (it controls everything else), then banking, then phone provider, then Apple/Google account, then social media. Use a password you have never used before. If in doubt, factory reset your phone.

8. What Recovery Actually Looks Like

Recovery is not linear. Nobody tells you this, and the expectation of a clean upward trajectory makes the bad days feel like failure. They are not failure. They are normal.

In the first weeks, everything feels worse. The numbness of survival gives way to the full force of what happened. You may feel more broken after leaving than you did while staying. This is because you are no longer spending all your energy maintaining the performance of normality. The feelings you suppressed to survive are now arriving, all at once, without the structure that contained them.

In the first months, the pattern may escalate. If you have left, expect hoovering – the attempt to pull you back. It may come as rage. It may come as charm. It may come as the version of them you fell in love with, arriving just when your resolve is weakest. This is the maintenance phase. It is not change. Anticipate it, prepare for it, and hold your boundary when it arrives.

Over the first year, you will rebuild. Slowly. Your perception recovers first – you start trusting what you see again. Your energy returns next – the chronic exhaustion of living inside extraction lifts gradually. Your identity returns last – the person you were before the pattern captured you. They are still in there. They have been waiting.

Two things accelerate recovery more than anything else. The first is a good therapist – individual, not couples, with someone who understands extraction. The second is your coalition – the people who validate your reality when doubt returns. The grandmother rebuilt, in whatever form she takes.

One thing slows recovery more than anything else: waiting. Every month spent hoping the pattern will change is a month of resources lost and a month of recovery delayed. The pattern does not change. The architecture changes. Your architecture. Starting now.

You survived the worst. The rest is rebuilding.

The species that built civilisation did it through cooperation, trust and the ability to recover from exploitation. You carry that capacity. The qualities that made you vulnerable to the pattern – your empathy, your trust, your good faith – are the same qualities that will rebuild your life. They are strengths. They were always strengths. The pattern targeted them because they were threats.

If you have just left: your first week

Day 1: You are safe. Everything else can wait. Call the National Domestic Abuse Helpline (0808 2000 247) if you need refuge placement. Tell at least one person. Eat something small – toast, soup, a banana. You won't want to. Do it anyway. Sweet tea helps with shock.

Day 2: Open a new bank account at a different bank from your ex. Apply for Universal Credit online and request a same-day advance payment. Change all passwords starting with email. Register at a new GP if you have moved – tell them about the abuse.

Day 3: Contact the NCDV (0800 970 2070) for a non-molestation order – often obtainable within 24 hours, free. Or contact a specialist domestic abuse solicitor (legal aid is available). Inform the school’s safeguarding lead.

Days 4–7: Start a routine – wake at the same time, eat at regular times, take a short walk. Keep a log of any contact or threats. Self-refer to NHS Talking Therapies. Ask your local domestic abuse service about the Freedom Programme (free, 12 weeks, available nationally including online). You survived. Acknowledge that.

9. Protecting What Comes Next

Recognition changes you. You cannot unsee what you have seen. This is a gift, even when it doesn't feel like one.

You will recognise the pattern faster next time. Not immediately – the good faith problem is built into your biology and it doesn't switch off because you've been hurt. But the signals will register sooner. The charm will trigger caution instead of warmth. The cycle will become visible at the assessment phase rather than the extraction phase. Your body learned. Trust what it tells you.

Be patient with yourself about new relationships – romantic, professional, any kind. You may find yourself suspicious of everyone. You may find yourself falling for the same pattern again, because the pattern targets the same wound. Both responses are normal. Neither is permanent. Time, therapy and your coalition will recalibrate your trust.

If you have children, they need your clarity more than your rage. Contain, don't blame – in front of them especially. They are learning how to handle the pattern by watching how you handle it. Your dignity under pressure is the most powerful lesson you can give them. They will need it.

If you co-parent with someone who has the pattern, document everything, communicate in writing, keep interactions minimal and factual, and accept that you cannot control what happens in their home. You can only control what happens in yours. Build the architecture your children need when they are with you. That is enough. It has to be.

Finally: the bitterness trap. The pattern's last weapon is the anger it leaves behind. Bitterness is understandable and it is a prison. It keeps you attached to the person who harmed you. It consumes the energy you need for rebuilding. It changes how people see you – and not in ways that help. Fierce protection with maintained dignity. That is the line. It protects you from becoming what you oppose.

You did not choose this. You did not cause it. You cannot cure it. But you can contain it, recover from it, and build a life the pattern tried to steal. That life starts with this guide. The morning check. The pattern journal. The coalition. The graduated response. The architecture.

Begin today.

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).

If you need support: visit www.trueregard.com/help for UK helplines, therapeutic resources and support organisations.

The Good Faith Problem: explains *why* you were vulnerable. Free download at www.trueregard.com.

Recognising Covert Narcissism: explains the hidden pattern in detail. Free download at www.trueregard.com.

The Personal Protection Toolkit: pattern journal, morning check, 48-hour challenge and weekly synthesis. Free download at www.trueregard.com.

The Family Court Survival Guide: if your situation involves the family courts. Available at www.trueregard.com.

The full framework: *The Extraction Pattern* by Vaughan Smith.
Available at www.trueregard.com/the-books.

Share this. Someone you know needs it. The pattern survives through isolation. Every copy shared is another grandmother rebuilt.

THE EXTRACTION PATTERN

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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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