

Where do the Protectors come from?

Protectors are a universal phenomenon, formed in our early childhood. They start off as our guardians to help us survive the real and imagined threats to our physical and emotional safety.

Their formation makes sense in evolutionary terms considering that the primary goal of the first fifteen to twenty years of life is just to survive long enough to reproduce.

For example, the Hyper-Vigilant protector represents a bias for noticing and exaggerating the negative. This bias is an important evolutionary design for our ancestors to have survived the dangers of the jungle. When the tree leaves started shaking, the early human who assumed the worst and ran was the one who survived and passed on their genes. The one who waited to gather full and unbiased information before taking action... became the tiger's dinner.

As children, we also need to survive *emotionally*. The human brain is wired to pay close attention to our environment in our early years and adjust accordingly so we can bear any emotional strains we encounter and make it into adulthood.

Even if you didn't have a difficult childhood, life still presented many challenges that your protectors initially developed to handle.

Maybe you had loving parents, but there was the scare of your mother getting sick and not knowing if she would ever come back from the hospital.

Or maybe you had a younger sibling who you thought your parents favoured over you. Of course, there were children at school who were taller, smarter, faster, or funnier than you.

There was the time you failed publicly, or got rejected, or felt betrayed.

There was the time you felt terrified with the idea of death, starvation, war, or one of the countless other dangers in this chaotic world.

And there was the time you promised yourself -- which you likely don't consciously remember -- that you would protect yourself so bad things wouldn't happen to you as often.

Your Protectors -- the Pleaser, the Controller, the Avoider, and all the rest -- were the buddies who helped you keep that promise.

By the time we are adults, these Protectors are no longer needed, but they have become invisible inhabitants of our mind.

That's where sabotage takes over using lenses through which we see and react to the world, without knowing we are wearing any distorting lens.

When faced with challenges, stress or uncomfortable situations, our Protectors are activated, and we fall into old, negative, self-sabotaging behaviors.

Does that start to make sense?

The Judge, the master Saboteur



The Judge is the universal saboteur that everyone has in action. It is the one that beats you up repeatedly over mistakes or shortcomings, warns you obsessively about future risks, wakes you up in the middle of the night worrying, gets you fixated on what is wrong with others or your life, etc.

Your Judge is your greatest internal enemy, activates your other top saboteurs, causes you much of your stress and unhappiness, and reduces your effectiveness.

Conquer your Judge so you can achieve more while having more fun along the way. The Judge uses one or more "accomplice" saboteurs to hijack your mind.

Pleaser



Indirectly tries to gain acceptance and affection by helping, pleasing, rescuing, or flattering others. Loses sight of own needs and becomes resentful as a result

Characteristics

- Has a strong need to be liked by people and attempts to earn it by helping, pleasing, rescuing, or flattering them.
- Needs frequent reassurance by others about their acceptance and affection.
- Can't express own needs openly and directly. Does so indirectly by having people feel obligated to reciprocate care.

Thoughts

- To be a good person I should put the needs of others ahead of my own.
- It bothers me when people don't notice or care about what I have done for them.
- They can be selfish and ungrateful.
- I give away too much and don't think of myself enough.
- I can make anyone like me.
- If I don't rescue people, who will?

Feelings

- Expressing own needs directly feels selfish.
- Worried that insisting on own needs may drive others away.
- Resentful for being taken for granted, but have difficulty expressing it

Justification Lies

- I don't do this for myself.
- I help others selflessly and don't expect anything in return.
- The world would be a better place if everyone did the same

Impact on Self and Others

- Can jeopardise taking care of one's own needs including emotionally, physically, or financially.
- Can lead to resentment and burnout.
- Others can develop dependence rather than learn to take care of themselves, and feel obligated, guilty, or manipulated.

Original Survival Function

The Pleaser tries to earn attention and acceptance through helping others. This is an indirect attempt to have one's emotional needs met. It is fed by two original assumptions that are picked up in childhood: 1. I must put others' needs ahead of my own. 2. I must give love and affection in order to get any back. I must earn it and am not simply worthy of it.

Hyper-Achiever



Dependent on constant performance and achievement for self-respect and self-validation. Highly focused on external success, leading to unsustainable workaholic tendencies and loss of touch with deeper emotional and relationship needs

Characteristics

- Competitive, image and status conscious.
- Good at covering up insecurities and showing positive image.
- Adapt personality to fit what would be most impressive to the other. Goal oriented and workaholic streak.
- More into perfecting public image than introspection.
- Can be self promoting.
- Can keep people at safe distance

Thoughts

- I must be best at what I do.
- If I can't be outstanding, I won't bother.
- Must be efficient and effective.
- Emotions get in the way of performance.
- Focus on thinking and action.
- I can be anything I want to be.
- You are worthy as long as you are successful and others think well of you

Feelings

- I don't like dwelling in feelings for too long.
- They distract from achieving my goals.
- Sometimes I feel empty and depressed inside, but don't linger there.
- Important to me to feel successful. That's what it is all about. I feel worthy mostly when I am successful.
- Could have fear of intimacy and vulnerability. Closeness with others would allow them to see that I am not as perfect as the image I portray

Justification Lies

- Life is about achieving and producing results.
- Portraying a good image helps me achieve results.
- Feelings are just a distraction and don't help anything

Impact on Self and Others

- Peace and happiness is fleeting and short-lived in brief celebrations of achievement.
- Self-acceptance is continuously conditioned on the next success.
- Lose touch with deeper feelings, deeper self, and ability to connect deeply with others.
- Others might be pulled into the performance vortex of the Hyper-Achiever and become similarly lopsided in their focus on external achievement

Original Survival Function

For the Hyper-Achiever, self-validation, self-acceptance and self-love are all conditional—conditioned on continual performance. This is often the result of either conditional or altogether absent validation from parental figures. Even with very loving and approving parents, it is easy for children to get the sense that they are loved in return for achieving, obeying the rules, having good manners, etc, rather than unconditionally.

Restless



Restless, constantly in search of greater excitement in the next activity or constant busyness. Rarely at peace or content with the current activity.

Characteristics

- Easily distracted and can get too scattered.
- Stays busy, juggling many different tasks and plans.
- Seeks excitement and variety not comfort or safety.
- Bounces (escapes) from unpleasant feelings very quickly.
- Seeks constant new stimulation

Thoughts

- This isn't fulfilling.
- This next thing has got to be more exciting.
- These negative feelings suck.
- I must shift my attention to something exciting.
- Why can't anyone keep up with me?

Feelings

- Impatience with what is happening now.
- Wondering what is next.
- Fear of missing out on other more worthwhile experiences.
- Restless and wanting more and more options.
- Worried that focus on any unpleasant feeling will grow and become overwhelming

Justification Lies

- Life is too short.
- It must be lived fully.
- I don't want to miss out

Impact on Self and Others

- Underneath the surface of fun and excitement of the Restless is an anxiety based escape from being present to this moment's full experience, which might include dealing with unpleasant things.
- The Restless avoids a real and lasting focus on the issues and relationships that truly matter.
- Others have a difficult time keeping up with the frenzy and chaos brought by the Restless and unable to build anything sustainable around it

Original Survival Function

The Restless is a strategy to find constant new sources of excitement, pleasure, and self-nurturing. This could be associated with early life experiences with inadequate parental nurturing or painful circumstances. Restless indulgence not only provided substitute selfnurturing, but also an escape from having to deal with anxiety and pain.

Controller



Anxiety-based need to take charge and control situations and people's actions to one's own will. High anxiety and impatience when that is not possible

Characteristics

- Strong energy and need to control and take charge.
- Connect with others through competition, challenge, physicality, or conflict rather than softer emotions.
- Willful, confrontational, straight talker.
- Push people beyond comfort zone.
- Comes alive when doing the impossible and beating the odds.
- Stimulated by and connects through conflict.
- Surprised that others get hurt.
- Intimidate others.
- In-your-face communication interpreted by others as anger or criticism

Thoughts

- You are either in control or out of control.
- If I work hard enough I can and should control the situation so it goes my way.
- Others want and need me to take control.
- You are doing them a favor.
- No one tells me what to do

Feelings

- High anxiety when things are not going my way.
- Angry and intimidating when others don't follow.
- Impatient with other's feelings and different styles
- Does feel hurt and rejected, although rarely admit to it

Justification Lies

- Without the Controller, you can't get much done.
- You need to push people.
- If I don't control, I will be controlled, and I can't live with that.
- I am trying to get the job done for all our sakes

Impact on Self and Others

- The Controller does get temporary results but at the cost of others feeling controlled and resentful and not able to tap into their own greater reserves.
- Controller also generates a great deal of anxiety as many things in work and life are ultimately not controllable

Original Survival Function

Underneath the bravado of the Controller there is often a hidden fear of being controlled by others or life. Controller is sometimes associated with early life experiences where the child is forced to grow up fast, be on its own, and take charge of its chaotic or dangerous surroundings in order to survive physically and/or emotionally. It is also associated with being hurt, rejected, or betrayed and deciding to never be that vulnerable again

Avoider



Focusing on the positive and pleasant in an extreme way. Avoiding difficult and unpleasant tasks and conflicts.

Characteristics

- Avoids conflict and says yes to things one wouldn't want.
- Downplays importance of real problems and tries to deflect others. Has difficulty saying no.
- Resists others through passive-aggressive means rather than directly.
- Loses self in comforting routines and habits; procrastinates on unpleasant tasks

Thoughts

- This is just too unpleasant. Maybe if I let it go it will take care of itself.
- If I deal with this now, I will hurt her feelings. I'd rather not.
- If I get into conflict with others, I might lose my connection with them.
- I have found balance. I don't want to mess with it. I'd rather give someone else their way than create a scene

Feelings

- Even keel.
- Anxiety about what has been avoided or procrastinated.
- Fear about hard-won peace of mind being interrupted.
- Suppressed anger and resentment rather than expressed anger

Justification Lies

- You are a good person to spare others' feelings.
- No good comes out of conflict.
- It is good to be flexible.
- Someone needs to be the peacemaker

Impact on Self and Others

- Denying the conflicts and negativities that do exist prevents one from actually working with them and turning them into gifts.
- Feeling numb to pain is different than knowing how to harvest the wisdom and power of pain.
- What is avoided doesn't go away and festers. Relationships are kept superficial through conflict avoidance.
- Others' trust level is reduced as they are not sure when negative information is being withheld.

Original Survival Function

Avoider could rise from both happy and difficult childhoods. In happy childhood, one might not have learned the resiliency of dealing with difficult emotions. In a childhood of high conflict and tension, the Avoider might come in to play peacemaker and learn to not add any negativity or tension of one's own on top of the existing family tensions.

Stickler



Perfectionism and a need for order and organisation taken too far

Characteristics

- Punctual, methodical, perfectionist.
- Can be irritable, tense, opinionated, sarcastic.
- Highly critical of self and others.
- Strong need for self-control and self-restraint.
- Works overtime to make up for others' sloppiness and laziness.
- Is highly sensitive to criticism

Thoughts

- Right is right and wrong is wrong.
- I know the right way.
- If you can't do it perfectly, don't do it at all.
- Others too often have lax standards.
- I need to be more organized and methodical than others so things get done.
- I hate mistakes

Feelings

- Constant frustration and disappointment with self and others for not living up to ideal standards.
- Anxious that others will mess up the order and balance I have created.
- Sarcastic or self-righteous overtones.
- Suppressed anger and frustration

Justification Lies

- This is a personal obligation.
- It is up to me to fix whatever mess I encounter.
- Perfectionism is good, plus it makes me feel better about myself.
- There is usually a clear right and clear wrong way to do things.
- I know how things should be done and must do the right thing

Impact on Self and Others

- Causes rigidity and reduces flexibility in dealing with change and others' different styles.
- Is a source of ongoing anxiety and frustration.
- Causes resentment, anxiety, self-doubt, and resignation in others, who feel continually criticized and resign themselves that no matter how hard they work they will never please the Stickler

Original Survival Function

The Stickler offers a way of quieting the constant voice of self judgment and fear of others' judgments through trying to be perfect. If you do what is right, you will be beyond interference and reproach by others. Perfection and order brings a sense of temporary relief. Might have generated a sense of order in the middle of a chaotic family dynamic, or earned acceptance and attention from emotionally distant or demanding parents by standing out as the unreachably perfect kid.

Hyper-Vigilant



Continuous intense anxiety about all the dangers and what could go wrong. Vigilance that can never rest

Characteristics

- Always anxious, with chronic doubts about self and others.
- Extraordinary sensitivity to danger signals.
- Constant expectation of mishap or danger.
- Suspicious of what others are up to.
- People mess up.
- Might seek reassurance and guidance in procedures, rules, authorities, institutions.

Thoughts

- When is the other shoe going to drop?
- If I make a mistake, I fear everyone is going to jump down my throat.
- I want to trust people, but I find myself suspicious of their motives.
- I need to know what the rules are, although I might not always follow them.

Feelings

- Skeptical, even cynical.
- Often anxious and highly vigilant

Justification Lies

- Life is full of dangers.
- If I don't look out for them, who will?

Impact on Self and Others

- This is a hard way to live.
- The constant anxiety burns a great deal of vital energy that could otherwise be put to great use.
- Loses credibility due to the "crying wolf" phenomenon.
- Others begin to avoid the Hyper-Vigilant as the intensity of that energy drains them

Original Survival Function

The Hyper-Vigilant often comes from early experiences where the source of safety and security (parental figure) was unpredictable and unreliable. It could also result when painful unexpected events proved life to be threatening or unreliable.

Victim



Emotional and temperamental as a way to gain attention and affection. An extreme focus on internal feelings, particularly painful ones. Martyr streak.

Characteristics

- If criticized or misunderstood, tend to withdraw, pout, and sulk.
- Fairly dramatic and temperamental.
- When things get tough, want to crumble and give up.
- Repressed rage results in depression, apathy, and constant fatigue.
- Unconsciously attached to having difficulties.
- Get attention by having emotional problems, or being temperamental and sullen.

Thoughts

- No one understands me.
- Poor me.
- Terrible things always happen to me.
- I might be uniquely disadvantaged or flawed.
- I am what I feel.
- I wish someone would rescue me from this dreary mess

Feelings

- Tend to brood over negative feelings for a long time.
- Feel alone and lonely, even when I'm around people I am close to.
- Feelings of melancholy and abandonment.
- Envy and negative comparisons

Justification Lies

- Maybe this way I get some of the love and attention that I deserve.
- Sadness is a noble and sophisticated thing that shows exceptional depth, insight, and sensitivity

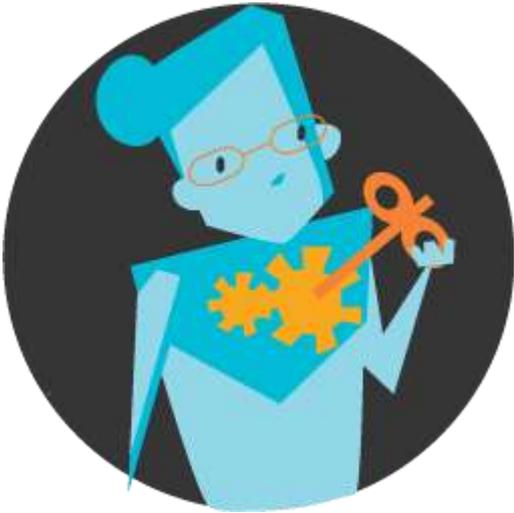
Impact on Self and Others

- Vitality wasted through focus on internal processing and brooding.
- Backfires by pushing people away.
- Others feel frustrated, helpless, or guilty that they can't put more than a temporary plaster on the Victim's pain

Original Survival Function

The Victim is sometimes associated with a childhood experience of not feeling seen and accepted, coming to believe that something is especially wrong with you. Victim is a strategy to squeeze out some affection from those who would otherwise not be paying attention. The moods mimic a false sense of aliveness.

Hyper-Rational



Intense and exclusive focus on the rational processing of everything, including relationships. Can be perceived as cold, distant, and intellectually arrogant.

Characteristics

- Intense and active mind, sometimes coming across as intellectually arrogant or secretive.
- Private and don't let many people into my deeper feelings.
- Mostly show feelings through passion in ideas.
- Prefer to just watch the craziness around me and analyze from a distance.
- Can lose track of time due to my intense concentration.
- High penchant for skepticism and debate

Thoughts

- The rational mind is where it is at.
- Feelings are distracting and irrelevant.
- Many people are so irrational and sloppy in their thinking.
- Needs and emotions of others distract me from my projects.
- I need to shut out intrusions.
- What I value most is knowledge, understanding, and insight.
- Self worth is attached to mastering knowledge and competence

Feelings

- Frustrated with others being emotional and not rational enough.
- Anxious about preserving personal time, energy, and resources against intrusions.
- Feeling different, alone, and not understood.
- Often skeptical or cynical

Justification Lies

The rational mind is the most important thing. It should be protected from the wasteful intrusion of people's messy emotions and needs, so it can get its work done

Impact on Self and Others

- Limits the depth and flexibility of relationships in work and life by analyzing rather than experiencing feelings.
- Intimidates less analytically intense people

Original Survival Function

The Hyper-Rational is a good survival strategy in early childhood circumstances of emotional turmoil or chaotic surroundings. The escape into the neat and orderly rational mind generates a sense of security or a sense of intellectual superiority. It also gains us attention and praise by showing up as the smartest person in the room.