

Week 2 – Family Systems: Mapping the Patterns You Are Living

How to See What You've Been Carrying — and Where It Came From

Before we begin, let's ground ourselves in where we've already been.

Last week, we talked about the hot stove.

About how marriage is powerful, and how confusion does not mean failure.

It often means we've been touching something powerful without understanding how it works.

The assignment last week asked you to slow down and notice what marriage has been “for” in your life.

That mattered because it showed you something important:

your reactions didn't start in this marriage.

They started earlier.

This week is about making that visible.

Here is the central idea for today:

You are not only in a marriage.

You are also standing inside a family system that shaped how you handle closeness, conflict, and anxiety.

Until you can *see* that system, it will quietly run you.

Let's make this practical right away.

I want you to imagine a blank piece of paper.

This is not art.

This is not therapy.

This is simply a map.

At the bottom of the page, write your name.

Next to it, write your partner's name.

Above you, write your parents' names.

Above them, write your grandparents' names.

Three generations.

That's enough.

Now draw simple lines:

marriages, divorces, deaths.

No detail yet.

Just structure.

Now the real work begins.

We are not looking for facts.

We are looking for *patterns*.

As you look at each generation, ask very specific questions.

Who handled conflict?

Who avoided it?

Who carried the emotional weight?

Who kept the peace?

Who withdrew?

Who became the focus when things were tense?

Write short notes.

One or two words.

Nothing fancy.

Let me give you a few examples.

Example one.

A woman realizes that in her family, her mother always smoothed things over.

Her father went quiet.

Conflict disappeared — but nothing was resolved.

Now, in her marriage, when tension rises,

she explains, reassures, and apologizes quickly.

When her partner goes quiet, she panics.

On the map, she sees:

“My anxiety isn’t about this argument.

It's about the silence I learned to fear.”

That changes everything.

Example two.

A man notices that his father carried responsibility for everyone.

His mother relied on him emotionally.

The children learned not to add stress.

In his marriage, this man feels responsible for his partner's moods.

He feels guilty wanting space.

He overfunctions until he's exhausted.

On the map, he sees:

“I'm not weak.

I'm repeating a role I learned early.”

That realization brings relief.

Example three.

Someone sees repeated cutoffs in their family.

When things got hard, people stopped talking.

Years went by.

Issues were never revisited.

In their marriage, this person withdraws when overwhelmed.

They tell themselves they “just need space,”

but the space turns into distance.

On the map, they see:

“This isn’t independence.

This is a learned escape from tension.”

Again — clarity, not shame.

This is how you work with a family map.

You are not judging.

You are not diagnosing.

You are not fixing.

You are asking:

Where have I seen this before?

Who carried this before me?

What role did I learn to play when anxiety rose?

Here is another key piece.

Notice misunderstandings that were never corrected.

Maybe:

love meant sacrifice,

anger meant danger,

closeness meant obligation,

or independence meant abandonment.

Those meanings travel across generations.

They don't disappear just because we grow up.

As you do this, something subtle happens.

Your current marriage stops feeling like the whole story.

It becomes one chapter in a longer pattern.

That perspective is stabilizing.

This is why the exercise that follows this lesson cannot be skipped.

The exercise will walk you step by step through creating your own family map

and identifying the roles and meanings you inherited.

If you skip it, this stays intellectual.

If you do it, recognition happens.

And recognition is what loosens anxiety.

Next week, we will take the next step.

Once you can see the patterns you were shaped by,

we will talk about how to stay yourself inside them

without cutting off or collapsing.

That skill is called differentiation.

For now, remember this:

What you are feeling did not start here.

And because it has a history,

it can be understood.