

THE AMBIVALENCE & HIDDEN PAYOFFS WORKSHEET

From Surface Clues to Root Causes

(The GardenShrink)

You can complete this worksheet in 5 minutes or 45 minutes.

Check what fits. Write only where you want. Skip anything that feels like too much.

A GENTLE NOTE BEFORE YOU BEGIN

This worksheet invites **honesty—not intensity**.

If at any point your emotions feel overwhelming, confusing, or too activating, it's okay to pause, skip a question, or come back later. Growth works best at a pace your nervous system can tolerate.

Insight is useful. Flooding is not.

1. RELATIONSHIPS & SYSTEMS

How staying the same might be keeping things stable

Check any that might apply (no overthinking):

- My change could disrupt the balance in my family or relationships
- Someone close to me might feel threatened, jealous, or left behind
- I play a role that others depend on
- Staying the same avoids conflict or backlash
- I'm unsure how others would react if I really changed

Optional reflection:

Who might need to adjust if I changed—and how does that affect me?

2. IDENTITY & SELF-CONCEPT

Who I am if this problem stays

- This struggle has become part of how I see myself
- I wouldn't know who I am without it
- Change would raise expectations—from me or others
- Staying the same keeps my identity familiar
- Letting this go would require rewriting my story

Optional reflection:

If this disappeared, who might I become—and what feels unsettling about that?

3. EMOTIONAL PROTECTION

What this pattern does for me emotionally

- This helps me calm down or feel better—at least briefly
- This distracts me from harder feelings
- This gives me a sense of control
- This protects me from feeling overwhelmed
- I'm unsure how I'd cope without it

Optional reflection:

What feeling might I have to face if this stopped?

4. ENERGY & CAPACITY

What change would cost right now

- I'm already stretched thin
- I don't have much margin for extra effort
- Change would require energy I don't currently have
- Staying the same conserves energy
- This might not be the right season

Optional reflection:

What would I need more of before change becomes realistic?

5. RESPONSIBILITY & RISK

What improvement would require of me

- I'd have fewer excuses
- I'd have to follow through
- I'd be more visible or accountable
- I'd have to face disappointment differently
- I'm unsure I want what comes next

Optional reflection:

What responsibility would I be stepping into if this improved?

6. SECONDARY GAINS

The quiet benefits of staying stuck

- I receive care, patience, or understanding because of this
- Expectations are lower
- This protects me from certain risks
- This gives me permission to disengage
- Letting this go would cost me something

Optional reflection:

What would I actually lose if this resolved?

PAUSE & SAFETY NOTE

If strong emotions come up, that's a signal to **slow down—not push harder**.
You're allowed to stop, skip, or return later.

OPTIONAL DEEPER DIVE

DIGGING UP THE ROOT BALL

(Only if you feel ready)

Sometimes pruning isn't enough.

You have to lift the plant—roots and all—to understand why it grew this way.

Choose **one** question, if any:

- When did this pattern first start making sense?
- What was it protecting me from back then?
- What would it mean to thank this pattern for its service—and retire it?
- What kind of soil would support healthier growth now?

Digging up the root ball doesn't mean blowing up your life.

It means understanding what shaped it—so you can replant wisely.

CLOSING SUPPORT NOTE

If this stirred more than you expected, that's not failure—it's information.

Some roots are best explored with support. A counselor, therapist, or wise guide can help keep this work grounded and safe.