



MODULE ONE

What is Self-doubt?



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Introduction

In this module, we explore the critical role of Self-doubt.

We are focused on the four core aspects of the Self-belief Coaching Model:

- The Self-doubt Loop
- Psychological Risk
- The Archetypes of Self-doubt (see the additional reference guide for your client work)
- The Self-belief Compass (we'll explore this deeply in Module 9).

Please watch the videos in Module One to deepen your understanding of these concepts.

As you move through the module, consider your relationship to self-doubt, as well as what you see in your work with clients.

Consider:

- What am I learning about self-doubt?
- What is unclear to me?
- How do these concepts help me to feel empowered, hopeful, human?
- In what ways do these concepts help me to work more profoundly with my clients?
- What questions do I have?

What is Self-doubt?

Throughout the SBCA programme, we'll explore key concepts, approaches and ideas relating to self-doubt:

Self-doubt is our in-built protection mechanism – it's the part of our psyche that tries to keep us psychologically safe.

Self-doubt is a sophisticated and complex response to risk. Ultimately, it finds a squillion different ways to say: *'don't do that, you might hurt yourself'*.

Self-doubt is always on the lookout for psychological risks. There are seven main risks: rejection, conflict, success, judgement, failure, complexity, and disappointment.

We perceive risk based on our lived experience – our self-doubt is almost always tethered to a memory.

Self-doubt is intimately connected to our stress response (flight, fight, freeze and fawn), so when our self-doubt is activated, we experience some form of discomfort.

We will attempt to alleviate the cause of this discomfort by resisting any action that we perceive as creating risk.

Over time our favoured forms of resistance can become entwined with our sense of self, forming patterns of beliefs and behaviours.

We understandably believe that our patterns of resistance are examples of our innate personality and identity rather than learned protective behaviours.

Self-doubt cannot predict the likelihood of a particular risk occurring, nor can it know the potential impact of a risk.

Self-doubt is activated based on our past experiences where we made meaning about ourselves, other people and the world. Meaning is often made during emotionally volatile situations, or when we were less able to understand the full context.

Self-doubt is an entirely understandable response to psychological risk – it is not a measure of capability, not a predictor of destiny.

Our experience of Self-doubt is always based on the ways we have learned to preserve our sense of emotional safety.

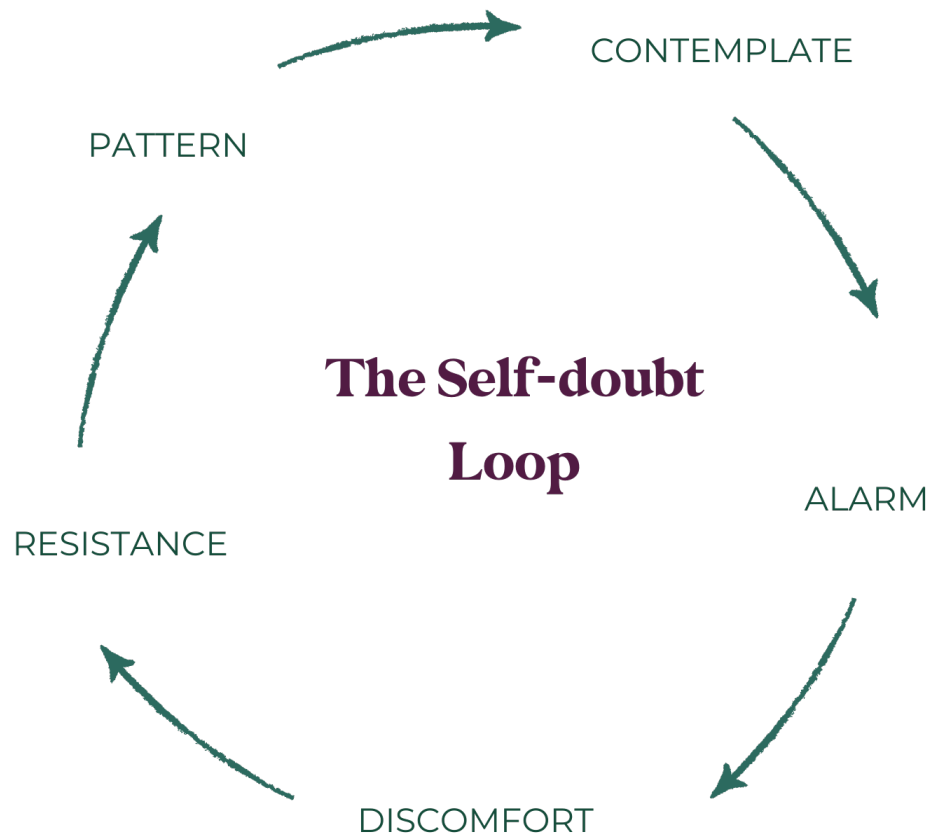
Self-doubt is the result of our most vulnerable selves feeling the least resourced.

There is no 'enemy within'; there is no faulty, broken part of us that is trying to sabotage our dreams. Self-doubt is trying to protect us from feeling the vulnerability that remains in our implicit memory. It does this by holding us back from any perceived psychological risk.

Self-doubt Coaches know self-doubt is our in-built Protector. As such, we reframe self-sabotage as *self-protection*.

Exploring the Self-doubt Loop

The Self-doubt Loop is a way of depicting what happens during an experience of Self-doubt. We slow down each stage of the 'loop' so we can see exactly what's going on and why.



CONTEMPLATE

We enter the loop at the moment before you are about to take action.

You are contemplating a task - what matters is whether or not you feel any vulnerability about the task itself or the impact of it.

Using a typical example:

- You contemplate sending an email to a colleague about a meeting you believe you should be attending, but you have not been invited.
- If there is no vulnerability, then you are likely to be able to complete that task and go about your day.
- If any level of vulnerability is present, your self-doubt is likely to be activated. And this has the potential to ruin your day.

SELF-DOUBT ALARM

The Self-doubt 'alarm' is what happens when self-doubt is activated. Remember, self-doubt as our in-built protection mechanism is always on the lookout for psychological risk. When a risk feels imminent, self-doubt is activated.

There are Seven Key Risks - rejection, conflict, success, judgement, failure, complexity, and disappointment. We all have different levels of sensitivity to different risks.

When self-doubt is activated, it finds a way to warn us: *'don't do that; you might hurt yourself'*.

Depending on the activity that has activated self-doubt, this might feel illogical, disproportionate, or overwhelming.

It's helpful to remember the self-doubt alarm **cannot** predict the likelihood of a particular risk occurring or the impact of that risk. We perceive the level of risk based on our experience of them.

In our example:

- Perhaps you suspect there is a chance of conflict if you send the email to your colleague?
- If you have some sensitivity to conflict – it makes sense that your Self-doubt is activated.

DISCOMFORT

The WAY self-doubt holds us back is deeply personal and based on your temperament, personality, self-awareness, and the context that has raised the alarm.

We experience self-doubt at different levels of intensity; we have different responses at different times to very similar stimulus - it's all specific to what's here, now at the moment self-doubt is activated.

Everyone who experiences self-doubt reports some level of psychological discomfort. This can take different forms:

- Experiencing an inner 'voice' something tells you that you cannot or should not take any action.
- Feeling difficult emotions.
- Body sensations can be really common - often a feeling of heaviness or constriction.

- Memories of past experiences related to the current scenario.
- Imagining the future – often imagining a worst-case scenario.

Recapping where we are in our example:

- You are about to send an email to your colleague about a meeting you haven't been invited to.
- Your self-doubt is activated because there is a chance of conflict - a risk you are sensitive to.
- You are feeling excluded, confused, sad, remembering past experiences of being left out and imagine a worst-case scenario where you are ostracised from your team completely.
- Everything in you says: don't do that; you'll hurt yourself.
- Doesn't it make complete sense that you want to resist taking any action?

RESISTANCE

I've found there are six main ways that we resist taking action – we call these The Six P's of Resistance:

1. **Procrastination.** Often productive, but it's always about delaying the task you find risky. Using our example: you find you have to tidy your work area and send 86 other emails first!
2. **Perfectionism.** This is about finding reasons that we aren't ready to take action - either fault with the task or with ourselves. It can also look like fantasising about a future scenario when everything is ideal. In our example, this can mean spending hours labouring over the right words for this email.
3. **Proving yourself.** This is about seeking external validation. In our example, maybe you volunteer for a project with your boss - just to show everybody how much you matter to the organisation.
4. **Passive behaviours** – when we consume rather than create - it might be scrolling, shopping, using drink and food, and in some cases, addictive or compulsive behaviours. Consumption is about avoiding taking action you perceive as risky.
5. **Paralysis** - when self-doubt shows up as paralysis it basically says - *nobody moves, nobody gets hurt*. Maybe you freeze, or you hide? This can also look like brain fog or confusion - where you believe you have no idea what to do or to say.

6. **Placating/ pleasing other people.** This is about the things we say and do (don't say and don't do) to preserve the relationship. It's often about abandoning your needs and emotions to keep the other person happy and reassuring yourself that they still like and approve of you.

The mainstream understanding of self-doubt says that we need to put all our energy into managing and controlling our resistance.

This is why we have hundreds of articles and books: '5 ways to hack your procrastination' or 'how to master your willpower or 'stop being a perfectionist with this quick and easy formula,' but this means we only ever deal with the symptoms of self-doubt.

When we focus on the resistance Self-doubt creates, we never address the root causes of self-doubt.

This will not address why our clients feel sensitive to psychological risk. This will not help our clients to feel resourced when their self-doubt is inevitably activated.

PATTERN

This brings us to the last step in the loop - where our favourite forms of resistance become patterns of beliefs and behaviours.

How we take care of ourselves when our self-doubt is activated starts to inform underlying beliefs and behaviour about what you believe you are capable of, how to relate with other people and how the world works.

Over time we can become identified with our patterns of resistance. These patterns become entwined in our identity, so we think this is who we really are (*'I can't do confrontation' 'I don't finish things'*).

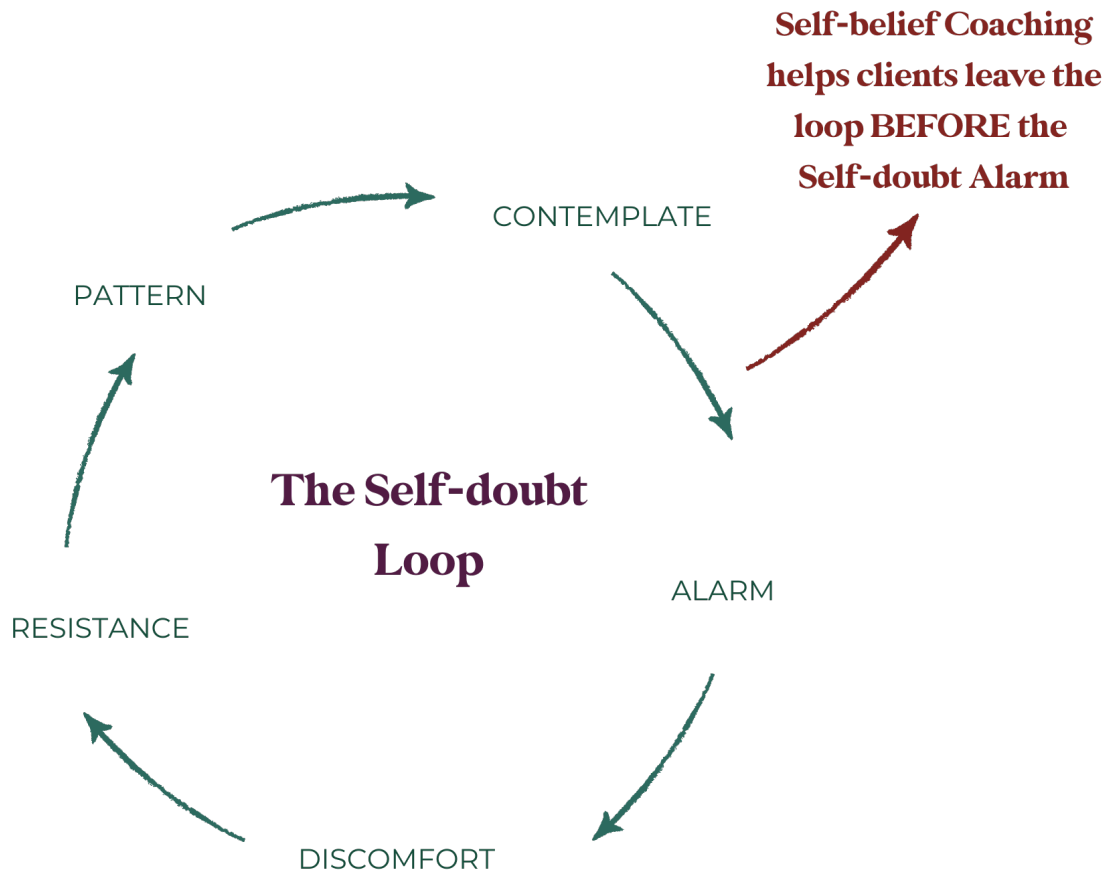
But when all we believe our self-doubt, it just means our most vulnerable selves are in charge in contexts when we are feeling the least-resourced.

In our example:

- Perhaps you had the first-hand experience that questioning someone else's mistakes led to conflict?
- A younger, less experienced part of you, at a time of heightened emotion, decided that this was something you should protect yourself from.
- This is the part that is in charge of you at the moment you are contemplating sending the email to your colleague.

Escaping the Self-doubt Loop

As Self-doubt Coaches, we want to help our clients to exit the Self-doubt Loop MUCH earlier – as soon as they notice their self-doubt is activated.



We do this by helping our clients to:

- heal the root causes of their self-doubt.
- feel resourced to respond in healthy ways when self-doubt is activated.
- own their innate strengths and gifts.
- cultivate self-belief, self-acceptance, self-worth, and self-trust.
- be braver and ultimately live in a way that brings more fulfilment and meaning.

We believe that self-doubt is an entirely understandable response to psychological risk. Self-doubt has nothing to do with capability or destiny and everything to do with the ways we have learned to preserve our sense of safety and belonging.

Self-doubt: The Protector

Self-doubt is our in-built protection mechanism – the entire purpose of Self-doubt is to warn us of the implications of perceived psychological risk. This is a profoundly important role inherent to our experience of being human.

Because we see self-doubt as ultimately a protective mechanism – as Self-belief Coaches, we reframe self-sabotage as *self-protection*.

In Module Six, we will explore the four ways our protective Self-doubt tends to manifest in our beliefs and behaviours. These are the Critic, Martyr, Scapegoat and Bystander.

WHERE DOES THE PROTECTOR COME FROM?

Our protective self-doubt is as old as we are - we are born innocent and vulnerable, and we need other people for our survival.

To begin, this is a physical safety - being held, nourished, cared for and accepted by those around us. As we grow, this also envelops our need for emotional and psychological safety.

As we learn how the world works and how to get our needs met, we are collecting information all the time. We begin to form a sense of who we must be, to feel safety and belonging.

If speaking up invited the judgement and criticism of a sibling or parent, we will have learnt to keep our thoughts and opinions to ourselves. Or maybe you grew up with a "perfect" family where there was no room to ever make a "mistake".

We protected ourselves the best ways we knew how, and when these ways seem to 'work' they became fused with our sense of self.

Our identities are formed by our interpretations of events combined with the roles most of us are given by our families: good girl, troublemaker, peacemaker, bookworm, comedian, the bad kid, the responsible one. As we grow up and make our way in the world, we begin to navigate a more complex web of relationships of friends, teachers, work colleagues, sexual partners.

We also encounter the assumptions and expectations our culture projects onto us.

The systems we participate in and are subject to are rooted in white supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy. This is far from benign.

Every day, we receive thousands of signals, unwritten messages, and unspoken indicators of who we need to be in order to access resources, opportunities and power that our culture values: it's so easy to understand how we internalise some of these ideas.

Throughout our lived experiences, our relationships, and as we digest the overt and subliminal messages from the world, our Protector is like a radar constantly scanning our lives for potential risk.

Our Protector is a composite of all the coping mechanisms we have devised in our lives. It is a combination of all the ways we have self-soothed and created safety for ourselves.

Doesn't it make complete sense that instead of taking steps towards our dreams, we might numb out with Netflix, or procrastinate with laundry, why we might focus on the hurtful opinions of others, why we feel we must keep everyone else happy?

There are always damn good reasons why we do this. These responses are our Protector actively managing all perceived psychological risks.

All self-doubt tells us is that we have found effective ways to keep ourselves psychologically safe. And there is usually a cost to this safety – dissatisfaction, frustration, unrealised potential, unmet longings, goals and dreams that are never achieved.

As Self-belief Coaches, our work is to help our clients to offer themselves compassion and understanding about the completely understandable reasons for their self-doubt while helping them to activate and develop internal resources of self-belief, self-acceptance, self-worth, and self-trust so they can create a life of courage, joy and meaning.

Psychological Risk

Our Protector is the part of the psyche that attempts to protect us from any perceived psychological risk.

There are Seven Big Risks that activate our protective self-doubt: rejection, conflict, success, judgment, failure, complexity, and disappointment.

This matters to us as Self-belief Coaches because it helps us to understand the root causes of our client's Self-doubt.

My interest in psychological risk was sparked by an organisational research project conducted by Google. Project Aristotle sought to understand if the qualities or characteristics of the highest performing teams at Google could be taught or replicated.

The key finding was that success was dependant on psychological safety.

Each team member believed the team was safe for risk-taking – they could share ideas, make mistakes, be creative, question authority and be individualistic without any fear of being seen as ignorant or incompetent or disruptive.

This correlates with Barbara Fredriksson's research that we tend to become more open-minded, resilient, motivated, and persistent when we feel safe. Humour, solution-finding and divergent thinking all increase.

I could see so many inverse parallels with self-doubt – and how our experience of discomfort tends to make it extremely difficult to access these inner resources.

If this is psychological safety, what does psychological risk look like? And could that be quantified or articulated in some way?

I spent months looking for patterns in my work with clients using a Grounded Theory research approach and found that our experience of psychological risk is not an amorphous cloud of fear and woe.

There are distinct risks – I found seven key risks that kept coming up - rejection, conflict, success, judgment, failure, complexity, and disappointment.

We seem to have a unique risk profile based on three key factors:

1. PAST EXPERIENCE OF SPECIFIC RISKS

Our past experiences form our belief systems - what we make it mean when one of those risks actually comes true, what we make it mean when we are facing a circumstance where there is a potential for that risk to come true.

If you grew up in a family that was intolerant of any kind of mistake, you might have a sensitivity to failure or disappointment. If you were criticised a lot at school, you may find you have a sensitivity to rejection or judgement.

2. YOUR BLUEPRINT

As well as past experiences, we also have innate qualities that inform our tolerance for psychological risk. I call this your 'blueprint' – it's the mix of your personality, your ability to bounce back from adversity, access to different resources like humour, perspective, emotional intelligence.

3. CURRENT CONTEXT

Our experience of self-doubt and how we respond to it is always contextual.

If you're doing something for the first time, if you're doing something you don't really understand, or it's outside of your natural preferences, how much sleep you've had, if you are feeling supported and well-rested – this all impacts how much risk tolerance you are able to muster.

What is incredibly hopeful and exciting is that we can develop risk resilience.

Anyone who is experiencing self-doubt is attempting to manage their experience of psychological risk. They are doing whatever they can to keep themselves safe. But we aren't fixed beings. We have this tremendous capacity to learn and evolve and grow, and we can navigate through these risks.

We can support our clients to understand and heal the root causes of self-doubt and how to cultivate a much more supportive belief system that will help to overcome, mitigate, and manage risks in ways that feel compassionate, and ease filled.

The Self-doubt Archetypes

The Self-doubt Archetypes is a coaching framework to identify and explore the emotional, behavioural and psychological patterns of how we experience and respond to self-doubt.

WHAT ARE ARCHETYPES?

An archetype is a way of characterising tendencies or themes that embody some essential element of human experience.

We find Archetypes showing up in art, literature, myths, fairy tales, religion and movies, within indigenous tribes and western communities.

Carl Jung first used the word 'Archetype' to refer to the universal patterns of our stories. Jung believed that all human beings are connected by what he called the 'collective unconscious' - and we make sense of our own lives through a common set of symbols, beliefs and behaviours.

Joseph Campbell's work in the 70s is also rooted in archetypes. More recently, Dr Carol Pearson and Caroline Myss have expanded Jung's work with respective bodies of work that examine Archetypal attributes within individuals and organisations.

THE SELF-DOUBT ARCHETYPES

There are twelve Self-doubt archetypes - They are all designed to be:

- Judgement-free: each contains strengths and gifts, as well as a shadow side of fears and challenges.
- Relatable: we recognise ourselves (and others) in the characterisations.
- Reassuring: how we experience and respond to self-doubt are valiant and effective ways we create emotional safety for ourselves.
- Adaptable: once we are aware of our tendencies, we can choose differently.
- Meaningful: they add depth and dimension to our personal experience of self-doubt.

Importantly – the archetypes are not descriptions of your personality - they are characterisations of how you experience and respond to self-doubt.

DEVELOPING THE FOUR META-THEMES

The research findings of my MA dissertation into self-doubt became a group coaching programme called: *Your Self-belief Map*. This programme explored the root causes of self-doubt, normalise and humanise our experience of it, and to help participants tap into and develop resources within themselves, so they felt more equipped when self-doubt struck.

After about fifty participants had gone through the programme, I began noticing common themes and experiences – both in original causes of self-doubt and patterns in how people responded to their self-doubt (themes like this are catnip to anyone with a research interest).

I began gathering data points - reviewing group discussion forums, client notes, emails from clients, collating quotes, descriptions of emotions, incidents, things that just felt useful or interesting.

I used a loose Grounded Theory research method - where theory is formed from what the research data tells us - from the ground up. I wasn't a purist - no one was going to grade this effort! But it did offer a reasonably robust approach or container for this exercise.

After a lot of phaffing around with post-its, I found there were four distinct areas. I should say that it's quite possible there are more – this model was formed from a relatively small sample of a few hundred people.

But based on the data gathered, I found four meta-themes - core areas where self-doubt is most prevalent: Leadership, Belonging, Boundaries and Wisdom.

CREATING THE ARCHETYPES MODEL FROM THE META-THEMES

The meta-themes felt robust and rooted in the experiences of clients I had worked with. However, I found there was an annoyingly inconsistent pattern within the data of each of the four aspects. Connected themes were sometimes wildly contradictory.

Eventually, I began to see that these four meta-themes each contained a spectrum of responses - an under-expression or over-expression, in response to their boundaries.

When a boundary was crossed, self-doubt was saying 'you don't matter', which led to a response from somewhere on the spectrum from passive resentment to full-on rage.

Exploring this nuance of the meta-themes as spectrums really unlocked something, and I found that within each, there are three quite specific characterisations of how we experience and respond to self-doubt.

These became the 12 Archetypes of Self-doubt.

THE SELF-BELIEF COMPASS

The Self-belief Compass is an expanded model of Self-belief – encompassing Self-belief, Self- acceptance, Self-worth and Self-trust.

You can see that each Archetype corresponds with one of these four meta-themes.

As self-belief (Sovereign), self-acceptance (Lover), self-worth (Warrior), and self-trust (Sage) grow and become alive within our clients (and us!), protective self-doubt has less to do.

We will dedicate Module 9 to the compass, including specific tools and approaches for developing these resources with clients.

USING THE SELF-DOUBT ARCHETYPES WITH CLIENTS

Inviting 1:1 clients to uncover their Self-doubt archetypes is an ideal way to begin your coaching work together. Please see the additional guidance for this.

Suggested approach:

- Invite your clients to complete the quiz as part of your enrolment process and send them the booklets relating to their top three archetypes.
- Because we tend to have different sensitivities to perceived psychological risks in different areas of our lives, the top three archetypes give a rounded view of how your client is likely to be impacted by Self-doubt.
- The Self-doubt Archetypes Model is a way to begin this discussion!

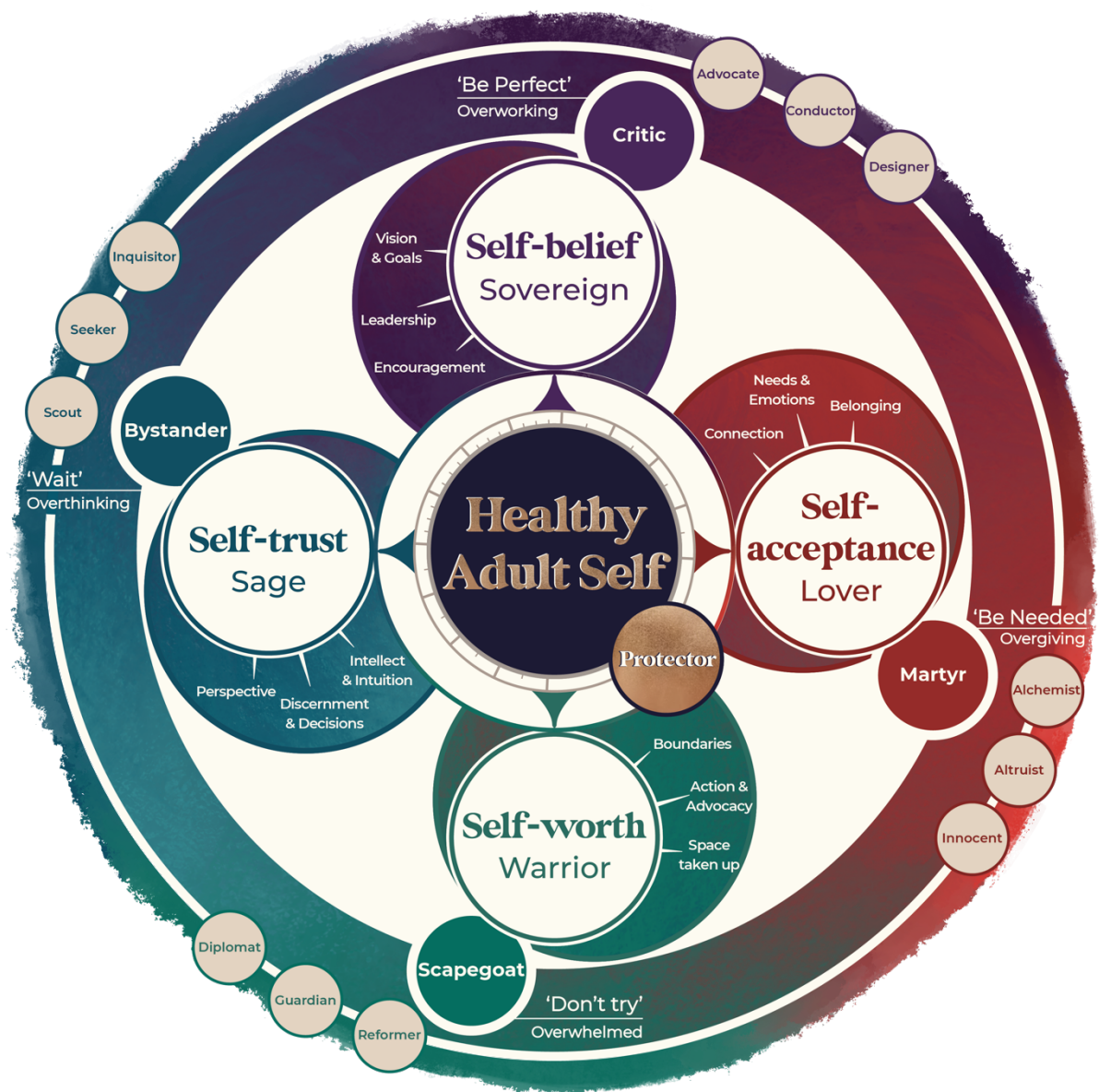
RESTRICTIONS:

Please note: you are NOT permitted to distribute The Self-doubt Archetypes Model more widely than your personal 1:1 clients. This means you cannot set up an electronic or online version of this quiz or the archetype model, nor can you offer it as a free product or as part of a group coaching programme. Thank you.

The Self-belief Coaching Model

The Self-belief Coaching Model shows how the Archetypes, the Protector, the Healthy Adult Self and the Self-belief Compass fit together.

We'll be exploring all of these aspects as we move through the SBCA programme.



References

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Fredrickson, B (2011) *Positivity: Groundbreaking Research to Release Your Inner Optimist And Thrive*. Oneworld Publications.

Courage + Spice: the podcast for humans with Self-doubt.