

‘Some more snags’: a reflective resource on self-sabotaging loops

Dr. Anthony Ryle identified relational patterns in **The Psychotherapy File*** so people could recognise them more easily. Among these were **snags** — loops of self-sabotage that can prevent change. He described two which I’ve summarised here: **1. If I succeed, I must sabotage it because it might harm others, invite envy, or there may not be enough to go around.** **2. I must sabotage good things because I don’t feel I deserve them.** After 30 years of clinical work, drawing on Cognitive Analytic Therapy and Brené Brown’s focus on vulnerability, I’ve seen some modern snags that also keep people stuck. I’ve included them here to support reflection and open conversation.

Read these slowly and see if any resonate with you. You can circle the ones to reflect on further and modify the words or patterns to suit your experience.

SNAG 01

If I change or succeed, people are off the hook. Healing / recovering can feel like excusing harm.

THE SNAG SAYS

“If I get better, injustice goes unchallenged.”

So, staying stuck becomes a form of protest / control or loyalty to my pain.

SNAG 02

If I get my needs met, I will be emotionally exposed. Showing I have needs equals vulnerability.

THE SNAG SAYS

If people see my needs, they can hurt me.

So, independence becomes by protection.

SNAG 03

If I change, people will stop caring about me. I may be left alone. My distress sometimes organises care or closeness.

THE SNAG SAYS

“If I get better, I lose connection.”

So, my distress becomes my way of connecting and feeling cared for.

SNAG 04

If I change, I will make others uncomfortable or put them at risk. I worry about outgrowing certain roles with family, friendships, work, or other groups.

THE SNAG SAYS

“My change threatens belonging and familiar dynamics or group workings.”

So, staying the same protects relationships.

SNAG 05

If I improve, people will expect more from me and I won’t cope or it will feel too much. Change raises the bar.

THE SNAG SAYS

Success is a trap that leads to overload.

So not trying new things becomes my way of protecting myself from being overwhelmed.

In my own words: A snag or loop that catches me out