

Loaded phrase pattern log

One loaded phrase from your ex, repeated to a lawyer, comes across like you're over-reacting. Fifteen of them, logged with their dates, their audiences, and the history that gives each one its charge, become something else entirely: a pattern of conduct. This log is where you build that pattern.

First, record his words verbatim, even when they sound harmless written down. Actually, especially when they sound harmless written down. That apparent harmlessness is the point you are documenting.

Second, keep every field factual. "He said X" and "on [date] he threw a dish at the wall" are facts. "He was trying to intimidate me" is an interpretation, and interpretations are for you and your support people, not for this log. The pattern will speak for itself.

Example entry

This example is fictional. It shows the level of detail to aim for, particularly in the "what it references" field, which is the one most people skip and the one that makes the pattern legible.

Date and time	<i>Saturday March 14, 5:45 pm</i>
Where and how	<i>In person, at the exchange in the grocery store parking lot</i>
Who was present or copied	<i>Both children; my friend K. who drove me</i>
His exact words	<i>"Don't forget the casserole." Said while smiling, as he buckled the kids in.</i>
What it references	<i>On [date, about two years ago] I burned a casserole. He threw the dish at the kitchen wall and [describe what happened, factually]. He has mentioned casseroles twice since we separated, both times in front of other people.</i>
What was happening around this time	<i>Our case conference is scheduled for March 27. This is the third comment of this kind since the date was set.</i>
What followed	<i>That evening he texted, politely, asking to "revisit" the schedule. I logged the text separately.</i>

Entries

Print or duplicate this page as many times as you need. Number your entries if you find that easier to track.

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Where and how	
Who was present or copied	
His exact words	
What it references	
What was happening around this time	
What followed	

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Reading your log: the pattern review

Once you have around ten entries, sit down with the log and answer these three questions. They are the difference between a diary and evidence of a pattern of conduct.

1. Do his "pleasantries" reliably reference past incidents?

Look down your "what it references" column. How many entries point back to a specific incident, threat, or vulnerability that only the two of you know about? A stranger reading your log should be able to see that these are not random topics.

2. Do they reliably arrive at particular moments?

Look at your dates and your "what was happening" column together. Do the phrases cluster around handovers? Hearings and deadlines? Moments when he had reason to believe you were stressed, isolated, or afraid? Timing is the part of the pattern that is hardest to dismiss, because it shows the behavior responding to a calendar.

3. Do they reliably stop when a professional is present or copied?

Look at your "who was present" column. Compare what he says when it is just you and the children with what he says, or writes, when a lawyer, teacher, coach, or other professional is in the room or on the thread. If the behavior switches off for certain audiences, your log now documents that he can regulate it, and does, selectively.

If you can answer yes to these questions, you are no longer holding a collection of moments that made your stomach drop. You are holding documentation of a man who modulates his behavior by audience. Bring the log, and these three answers, to your lawyer or coach and let them advise you on how it can serve your file.

A note on safety: if documenting feels risky in your situation, or if his behavior is escalating, your safety comes before your record. Contact the police and your local domestic violence hotline.