

Schema Therapy

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Schema Therapy was developed originally by Young (1990, 1999) and colleagues and it blends several therapeutic approaches. It is seen as an alternative for clients not able to respond to cognitive behavioural therapy because they cannot readily access their emotions and talk about them. Instead, they are considered to have early maladaptive schemas, which are pervasive themes or patterns that developed during childhood or adolescence and are now impacting in their lives generally. These schemas comprise memories, emotions, cognitions, and bodily sensations, and are in relation to self and to relationships with others.

Young et al (2008) describe schemas as “self defeating emotional and cognitive patterns that begin early in our development and repeat throughout life” (p.7). They emphasise that a schema does not include behaviour and say that the behaviour is driven by the schema. Each schema is a reality-based representation of the child’s environment, which will reflect the ‘tone’ of events but may be based on faulty reasoning.

Schema modes are the moment to moment emotional states and associated coping responses. There are four Child modes:

- ◆ Vulnerable Child mode shows in fear, sadness and helplessness.
- ◆ Angry Child mode shows as it sounds.
- ◆ Impulsive/ Undisciplined Child mode shows as impulsive acts that take no account of the needs or feelings of others.

- ◆ Happy Child is a positive mode, with no associated schemas, when a person feels loved, connected and content.

There are two types of Parent mode, which are both dysfunctional i.e. associated to schemas:

- ◆ Punitive/Critical Parent shows in restricting, criticising or punishing self or others.
- ◆ Demanding Parent mode pressures self or others to achieve high expectations and levels of responsibility.

Finally, there is a Healthy Adult mode, which serves as an ‘executive’ function relative to the other modes. People vary in how much Healthy Adult they have with which to nurture their Vulnerable Child, set limits for their Angry Child and Impulsive/ Undisciplined Child modes, and battle or moderate their Demanding Parent mode.

The list below shows the maladaptive schemas. Each may be evidenced in one of three ways:

- ◆ As a freeze response, when we ‘surrender’ to the schema and live according to it, including within our relationships, or lack thereof.
- ◆ As a flight response, where we function to avoid the implications of the schema, such as by avoiding situations or relationships where the schema might have an impact.
- ◆ As a fight response, where we overcompensate so that we get an opposite, equally negative outcome.

The following list is a simplified version of the 18 schemas identified by Young

(op cit), with the names indicated to show the range.

References

Young, J E, (1990) *Cognitive Therapy for Personality Disorders*. Sarasota FL: Professional Resources Press.

Young, J E, (1999) *Cognitive Therapy for Personality Disorders: A Schema – focused approach* (rev. ed) Sarasota FL: Professional Resources Press.

Young, J E, Klosko, J S & Weishaar, M E (2008) *Schema Therapy: a Practitioner’s Guide*. London: The Guilford Press.

Gets abandoned	Clings and smothers
Gets abused	Abuses
Emotionally deprived	Emotionally demanding
Gets criticised	Criticises others (Be Perfect)
Socially alternated	Chameleon to fit in
Dependent	Totally self- reliant
Scared of harm and illness	Counterphobic
Enmeshed	Oppositional
Failure	Over achiever
Self entitlement	Attends to need of others
Lack of self discipline	Over controlled
Subjugates self to others	Rebels
Self sacrifices	Gives little
Seeks approval	Provokes disapproval
Pessimism	Overly optimistic
Emotionally inhibited	Overly emotional
Hypercritical	Doesn’t care about standards
Punitive to self and others	Overly forgiving