

How Schemas Work Handout

A maladaptive schema is essentially a belief about yourself and your relationship to the world. The core sense and feeling is that something is wrong with you, with your relationships, or with the world at large. Schemas are formed in childhood and develop as a result of ongoing, dysfunctional experiences with parents, siblings, and peers during childhood, and continue to grow as children attempt to make sense of their experience and avoid further pain. Schemas come from repeated toxic messages that we get about ourselves from our early experiences (i.e. "you're bad," or "you don't do anything right") or specific traumatic events. Once a schema is formed, it's extremely stable and becomes an enduring pattern that is elaborated throughout one's life. Schemas are like a pair of sunglasses that distort all of our experiences and reality, they color the way we see things and make assumptions and predictions that tell us our schemas are true or that they will turn out to be true. These schemas that were formed in childhood now get triggered over and over again throughout our adult life by stressful interpersonal events and thoughts and feelings that come up for us. Once a schema is triggered it brings up specific powerful, automatic, and conditioned thoughts and feelings about ourselves that can lead to depression, panic, loneliness, anger, relationship conflict, inadequate work performance, addictions, and problematic decision-making. Schemas interfere with our ability to feel safe and satisfy basic needs in relationships to others.

Characteristics of Early Maladaptive Schemas

- *They are experienced as a priori truths about oneself or one's environment.*
- *They are resistant to change and are self-perpetuating.*
- *Schemas help predict the future—what will happen in relationships—and, because they create the illusion that one can see what's coming, are extremely difficult to give up.*
- *Schemas are usually triggered by stressful events—something painful in a relationship that activates old beliefs about the self.*
- *Schemas are always accompanied by high levels of affect—shame, fear, hurt, despair.*

Schema Handout

Ten Key Schemas

1. **Abandonment/Instability**-the belief that significant people in their life are unstable or unreliable
2. **Mistrust/Abuse**-the expectation that they will be harmed through abuse or neglect
3. **Emotional Deprivation**-the expectation that the need for emotional support will not be met
 - a. Deprivation of nurturance-the absence of attention
 - b. Deprivation of empathy-the absence of understanding
 - c. Deprivation of protection-the absence of guidance
4. **Defectiveness/Shame**-the belief that one is defective, inferior or unlovable
5. **Social Isolation/Alienation**-the belief that one does not belong to a group, is isolated or different from others
6. **Dependence**-the belief that one is incompetent or helpless and requires significant assistance from others and/or the belief that one cannot survive without another
7. **Failure**-the belief that one is inadequate and will ultimately fail
8. **Entitlement/Grandiosity**-the belief that one deserves privileges and is superior to others
9. **Self-sacrifice/Subjugation**-voluntarily meeting the needs of others at the expense of one's own gratification or submitting to others to avoid consequences and surrendering control to others due to real or perceived

coercion (subjugation of needs involves suppressing one's own desires to preferences; subjugation of emotions involves the suppression of emotions, particularly anger)

10. **Unrelenting Standards/Hypercriticalness**-the belief that one must meet a very high internalized standard to avoid the criticism of others; it involves impairment in the areas of pleasure, health, and satisfying relationships

Handout: Ten Schema Coping Behaviors (SCBs)

Attack (Overcompensation)

1. Aggression, Hostility: If you are using this coping behavior in response to a schema triggering event you would find yourself counterattacking with blaming, criticizing, challenging or being resistant.
2. Dominance, Excessive Self-assertion: If you are using this coping behavior in response to a schema triggering event you would find yourself taking control of others in order to accomplish your goals.
3. Recognition-seeking, Status-seeking: If you are using this coping behavior in response to a schema triggering event you would find yourself overcompensating by trying to impress others, and get attention through high achievement and status.
4. Manipulation, Exploitation: If you are using this coping behavior in response to a schema triggering event you would find yourself trying to meet your own needs without letting other know what you are doing. It may involve the use of seduction or not being completely truthful to others.
5. Passive-aggressiveness, Rebellion: If you are using this coping behavior in response to a schema triggering event you would appear to be compliant, but you would be rebelling by procrastinating, complaining, tardiness, pouting or non-performance.

Surrender

6. Compliance, Dependence: If you are using this coping behavior in response to a schema triggering event you would find yourself relying on others, giving in, being dependent, behaving passively, avoiding conflict and pleasing others.

Avoidance

7. Social withdrawal, Excessive autonomy: If you are using this coping behavior in response to a schema triggering event you would find yourself isolating socially, disconnecting and withdrawing from others. You may appear to be excessively independent and self-reliant rather than being involved with others. You may engage in more solitary activities such as reading, TV watching, computer use, or solitary work.
8. Compulsive Stimulation-seeking: If you are using this coping behavior in response to a schema triggering event you would find yourself seeking excitement or distraction through shopping, sex, gambling, risk-taking or physical activity.
9. Addictive Self-soothing: If you are using this coping behavior in response to a schema triggering event you would find yourself seeking excitement with drugs, alcohol, food or excessive self-stimulation.

Schema Triggers Worksheet

Domain	Schema	Triggers	Thoughts and feelings
Work			
Friends			
Family			
Intimate Relationships			
Parenting			
Community			

Schema Coping Behavior Outcomes Worksheet

SCB	Domain	Outcome
	Work	
	Friends	
	Family	
	Intimate Relationships	
	Parenting	
	Community	

Schema Coping Behavior Outcomes Worksheet

Schema Coping Behavior (from your SCB Worksheet in chapter 4)	My Emotions	Others' Reactions
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		
11.		
12.		

Value Domains Worksheet

Domain	Importance (Rate 0-2)	Value	Intention
Work relationships			
Friendships			
Family			
Parenting			
Partner Relationships			
Community Relationships			

Values

New Intentions Worksheet

Relationship	Old Schema Coping Behavior	Value	Intention

Values	Intentions	Blocks/Barriers	Rate
1.	1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.	3.
4.	4.	4.	4.
5.	5.	5.	5.
6.	6.	6.	6.

Assessing Barriers Worksheet

Intention	Emotional Barrier	Cognitive Barrier
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		

Exposure Record

[illegible]

The Interpersonal Problems Workbook

- *Example*

It's me, Lara, again. Over three weeks of doing exposures, here are my outcomes:

Lara's Exposure Record

Emotion	Trigger Situation	Exposure Type		Outcome
		IB	PM	
Anger/failure feeling	Jane boasting how fast she is.	X		No change in feeling; a little afraid of it. I see how driven I feel to attack her.
Anger/failure feeling	Jane pretending to commiserate when I made a mistake.	X		No change in feeling.
Anger/failure feeling	Boyfriend criticized some clothes I bought.	X		A little less upset; able to tolerate the feeling; learning to just watch it.
Hurt/rejected	Boyfriend late.	X		Stayed with it longer and got a little more used to the feeling; accepted it more.
Anger/failure feeling	Jane brags how close she is to our boss.	X		Upset went down during longer exposure; many judgments; more accepting of failure feeling; feeling changed to sadness.
Anger/failure feeling	Jane boasts about sales.		X	Resisted SCB; was able to act on intention.
Failure feeling	Boss criticizes that I don't convert enough of my leads.		X	SCB: Made excuses, which he didn't like. Rewrote my leads-conversion script (values-based behavior). Exposure didn't go well; avoided it; lost in self-judgment thoughts.

Defusion Skills

1. **Naming the mind.** Give your mind a name (other than your own name, of course!).
2. **Scheduling a time to worry, obsess, ruminate, get angry, blame, and so on.** An example would be "I'll put this aside for now and worry about what a failure I am at eight o'clock tonight."
3. **Assigning descriptive labels to whatever passes through your mind.** As you observe your experience, you can simply acknowledge and label your internal experience with broad terms like "thought," "memory," "desire," "feeling," "urge," "regret," "yearning," "image," "impulse," "wish," "plan," "idea, and so on.
4. **Having (not being) your experiences.** You can use the phrase "I'm having..." to help you separate yourself from your experiences; for example, "I'm having the thought that..." "I'm having the evaluation that..." "I'm having the sensation that..." "I'm having the feeling that..." "I'm having a thought that is predicting..."
5. **Labeling thoughts.** When you notice specific thoughts, labeling them can help you let them go; for example, "That was a 'harsh' thought," "That was a 'judgmental' thought," "That was a 'prediction' thought," "That was a 'fear' thought," or "That was a 'self-hating' thought."
6. **Thanking your mind.** Sometimes the mind will quiet down a bit if it feels it's been heard. Try thanking your mind for its sometimes not-so-helpful efforts to help you: "Thank you, Mind, for that thought [judgment, prediction, memory, or whatever]." You can even use the name you've come up with for your mind or say you aren't interested at this time: "Thank you, Amanda, for that thought, but I don't want to buy it right now."
7. **Repeating the thought out loud in a silly voice.** You can also sing thoughts.
8. **Putting thoughts on clouds.** You can visualize putting your thoughts on clouds and then watching them drift away. Or you may prefer a different image, such as boxcars on a train passing by, balloons floating away in the sky, leaves being carried away a stream, and so on.
9. **Objectifying, or thinking of thoughts as physical objects.** Imagine what physical characteristics your thought might have, such as size, color, texture, shape, density, consistency, weight, flexibility, temperature, and so on. This technique is also very useful for disentangling yourself from emotions and other internal experiences.
10. **Physical letting go.** You are encouraged to practice this exercise together with clients. Both of you can hold out your right hands, palm up. As thoughts arrive for each of you, rotate your hand so the palm is facing down and imagine the thought dropping out of sight.
11. **Card carrying.** This defusion technique has clients carrying cards where they write down thought monsters as they come up. Then, as these painful cognitions recur, clients can remind themselves, "It's on the card," and let it go

Interpersonal Experiences Diary

Event:

- Schema emotion(s):
- Schema-related thoughts:
- Physical sensations:
- Schema-driven urges:
- Circle one: acted on urge didn't act on urge

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Four Key Questions

Thought: _____

1. *How old is this thought?* _____

2. *What's the function of this thought?* _____

3. *How's the thought working out for me?* _____

4. *Am I willing to have this thought and still act on my values in relationships?*² (What will you do or say?) _____
