



# Schema Focused Therapy

## Anxiety & Stress

Schema therapy is an integrative therapeutic approach that combines aspects of cognitive-behavioral, gestalt, object relations, constructivism, and attachment theories. It targets deep-rooted patterns established early in life that persistently affect behavior. By focusing on these core schemas, the therapy seeks to facilitate significant and enduring changes for individuals facing long-standing psychological issues.

### Origins of Schema:

The basic view is that schemas result from unmet core emotional needs in childhood. The five postulated core emotional needs for human beings, as follows:

1. Secure Attachment to other (includes safety, stability, nurturance & acceptance)
2. Autonomy, Competence & Sense of Identity
3. Freedom to express valid needs & emotions.
4. Spontaneity & Play
5. Realistic limits & self control

These universally believed needs are widely experienced with varying intensity. A psychologically healthy individual is one who can adaptively meet these core emotional needs.

### What are Schemas?

In essence, a schema is a mental framework that individuals use to understand and interpret the world around them. It acts like a blueprint, highlighting the key features of an experience and guiding our responses. Psychologist Jean Piaget is most credited with detailing how schemas develop throughout childhood. Similarly, in cognitive psychology, schemas are seen as abstract plans that help us solve problems and make sense of information. For example, we might have a schema for understanding sentences (linguistic schema) or interpreting cultural myths (cultural schema).

## Schemas in Psychotherapy -

Schemas are enduring psychological patterns formed often in early life that persistently influence our thoughts and behaviors. These schemas, which can be both positive and negative, strive for cognitive consistency, shaping our self-concept and worldview, sometimes inaccurately. They can be adaptive, aiding in coping and understanding, or maladaptive, hindering our functioning. While typically developing during childhood, schemas can also form later in life.

### How Early Maladaptive Schemas Hinder CBT:

- Disconnection & Rejection Schemas: Make it difficult to form a trusting bond with the therapist quickly.
- Impaired Autonomy & Performance Schemas: Can lead to confusion about identity and goals, hindering treatment objective setting.
- Other-Directedness Schemas: Cause patients to focus on the therapist's desires rather than their own thoughts and feelings.
- Impaired Limits Schemas: Result in a lack of motivation or discipline to follow through with treatment procedures.

## How Early Life Experiences Shape Schemas?

Often referred to as Early Maladaptive Schemas, are described as enduring negative patterns that originate in childhood. The core argument is that the dynamics of a child's family environment lay the groundwork for their entire early world. When adults encounter situations that trigger these schemas, it's often a replay of unresolved childhood experiences, usually involving a parent figure.

While other influences like peers, school, and culture play a role as the child matures, the impact is generally less profound than that of the nuclear family. Schemas formed later in life, such as Social Isolation, tend to be less pervasive compared to those rooted in early childhood.

1. Toxic Frustration of Needs
2. Traumatization or Victimization
3. Overindulgence & Excessive Support
4. Selective Internalization Of Significant Others



## Schema Domains & EMS

Schema Therapy has grouped a total of 18 identified schemas in to 5 broad areas of unmet emotional needs, which are called 'Schema Domains'. The following mind-map delineates the Schema Domains & the respective maladaptive schemas, it is important to highlight that these schemas can overlap within an individual.



Schema therapy differentiates between the schema itself & the strategies used to by an individual to cope with schema. Thus in the model, the schema itself contains memories, emotions, bodily sensations & cognitions, but not the individual's behavioral response. Behavior is not part of the schema; it is part of the coping response. The Schema drives the behavior.

The Schemas usually associated with Anxiety is abandonment, vulnerability to harm or illness, failure, self-sacrifice & emotional inhibition. Like any traditional therapeutic modality, schema therapy has an inventory, Young Schema Questionnaire - Revised (YSQ-R, 2021).

## Techniques used for Anxiety & Stress with a case vignette

Rene, our leading lady, is a modern-day warrior battling chronic worry, sleepless nights, and an ever-present tension. Juggling daily tasks feels like a circus act, sprinkled with frequent panic attacks. Her anxiety isn't just a sidekick; it's the main event, stealing the spotlight at work, in her relationships, and even her chill time.

Growing up, Rene was in a tough gig where being flawless was the ticket to her parents' approval. Her dad was the judge, her mom, the ghost. Feeling like an island, she danced with feelings of not measuring up and being left out. Fast forward to now, and she's still chasing after gold stars, haunted by the fear of flopping and being left behind.

The Assessment & education phase of Schema therapy has six major goals:

1. Identification of dysfunctional life patterns
2. Identification & triggering of Early Maladaptive Schemas
3. Understanding the origins of schemas in childhood & adolescence
4. Identification of coping styles & responses
5. Assessment of temperament
6. Finally, case conceptualization

Psychoeducation is like a superhero team-up with self-awareness, helping clients unravel their concerns. Picture them as detectives, uncovering their inner child, quirky grown-up, and unhelpful coping strategies that are keeping them from adulting like a pro. By sleuthing through these modes, clients can decode their needs using early maladaptive schemas (EMS).

Enter Schema Therapy, a dynamic duo of cognitive and experiential techniques that I'll delve into later on.

One secret weapon in my arsenal? The Schema Diary! It's like a personal guide helping clients spot their EMS in action and switch gears to adulting mode for a smoother ride in the real world.