

Maladaptive Schemas



It is natural for humans to make meaning and have beliefs about ourselves, others and the world. If our core emotional needs aren't met or we have been mistreated (especially in our early years, when beliefs are first formed) we will end up with a maladaptive schema. A schema is both a belief and a life plan (as the brain makes behaviour based on these schemas). Psychologists have identified 18 of these that cause issues in 5 categories, detailed below.

Disconnection and rejection schemas

Abandonment/ Instability

The people that matter to us won't continue to meet our emotional needs. They are unreliable, will leave or will die.

Mistrust/ abuse

People will hurt us, they might abuse us, neglect us, manipulate, lie, cheat, etc.

Emotional deprivation

Our emotional needs will not be met.

Defectiveness/ shame

The belief that we are bad or less than others. This leads to an assumption that we will be "found out" so rejected or criticised.

Social isolation/ alienation

The belief that we are isolated from others, potentially because of something we think is wrong with us.

Impaired autonomy and performance

Dependence/ incompetence

The belief that we cannot cope with things or need others to manage things for us.

Vulnerability to harm/illness

This is a belief that we are vulnerable to harm. This could be physical, emotional or even illness.

Enmeshment (underdeveloped self)

We don't have clear understanding of our wants and needs so our feelings and personality are dominated by others.

Failure

A belief that you will fail in everything.

Impaired limits

Entitlement/ Grandiosity

Believing that you are better than other people and are entitled to special treatment.

Low self-control

The belief that you must have your needs met immediately no matter the consequences for you or others.

Other Directedness

Subjugation

The belief that you must surrender control of your autonomy, wants and needs to avoid being punished, abused or abandoned.

Self-sacrifice

Where a person feels the need to meet other peoples needs at their own expense.

Approval/ recognition seeking

Taking our sense of approval and wellbeing from others praise rather than developing a strong sense of self.

Over- vigilance & Inhibition

Negativity/ Pessimism

A focus on negative things such as pain, death, illness, sadness, disappointment, problems, mistakes, failures, etc.

Emotional inhibition

You believe you have to inhibit your thoughts, feelings or behaviours to avoid a negative consequence. For example you might not talk as you are worried that what you say will be judged.

Unrelenting standards/ Hypercriticalness

A belief that you must meet extremely high standards or not be good enough/ will be judged. The standards are often unfair to you.

Punitiveness

The belief that people (or you) should be punished or face negative consequences for doing things wrong.