Schema Modes

PROGRESS PSYCHOTHERAPY

Our schemas play out as different aspects of our personality called schema modes. Schemas being active can cause us to feel, think and behave in line with the schemas assumptions. They develop from childhood and across our lives. These flashcards explain the modes and ask you to think what you can do to help. Add key notes to them. You can write these in or cut out the cards (try to print on card if possible).

Healthy adult

This mode emerges as we emotionally mature. It is believed to come from positive schemas and times where emotional needs were met and nurtured. It can be seen as your true self, the part that is free of the maladaptive schemas.

You are trying to do 3 things-

1- Identify and meet your needs, nurture and protect yourself.
2- Place healthy limits on ourself in a non-judgemental way.
3- Challenge negative or self-critical modes with self-compassion.

Vulnerable child

This mode emerges in childhood and is the part that most deeply felt the unmet needs. In this mode you will feel down on yourself, anxious, sad, lonely or hopeless.

Commonly associated schemas- abandonment, mistrust/abuse,emotional deprivation, defectiveness, social isolation, dependence, vulnerability, enmeshment, pessimism.

Healthy adult will attempt to nurture and protect this mode as its primary goal. It will soothe, care for and try to meet the unmet needs as healthily as possible.

Parental / critic modes

At the beginning of our lives, we are dependent by whoever takes care of us. We internalise our understanding of the messages they send as the parental modes. They are recently being redefined as the critic modes since it is anyone with a significant moral role can add to these like teachers, religious figures, important figures in society, etc.

Demanding parent/critic

This mode has us operating from the moral lessons we were taught. Can be unhealthy if it is too strong. If you are doing a lot of should and musts or criticsing yourself you may be in this mode.

Commonly associated schemas- Unrelenting standards, self -sacrifice.

Healthy adult will place limits on this based on what is fair, reasonable and self compassionate.

Punitive parent/critic

This mode has us operating from an assumption people should be punished for failings or mistakes. May be common if this happened to you earlier in life. Statements about deserving bad things or wishing for punishment to make up for failing could mean you are in this mode.

Commonly associated schemas- Punitiveness, subjugation, defectiveness,mistrust/abuse.

Healthy adult will place limits on this based on rationality and compassion.

Other child modes

The child modes are emotional states that emerge in childhood at the same time as vulnerable child, they don't mean you are being childish. Again, the messages we get and unmet needs will determine the schemas and modes. The healthy adult will place appropriate limits on the child modes to let them have their positive parts but not the maladaptive. Importantly, it will also nurture and protect the vulnerable child.

Happy child

This mode comes from times we felt loved, carefree, connected, contented. Especially the need for spontaneity and play. You may not often feel this mode and it could be helpful to engage with it.

Commonly associated schemas- None.

Healthy adult will attempt to allow this mode to emerge in times where it is reasonable and safe to do so since many adults may not feel very connected to it.

Impulsive child

This mode can come from poor boundaries and not learning about practicalities and delayed gratification. Can be maladaptive if unconstrained.

Commonly associated schemas- Entitlement, lack of self- discipline.

Healthy adult will attempt to place practical and healthy limits, balancing legitimate wants and needs with practicalities and others needs.

Angry child

This mode comes from unmet needs, neglect, abuse or fear. It is a mode of aggression, where we defend ourselves in response to mistreatment or core needs not being met.

Commonly associated schemas- Abandonment, mistrust/ abuse, emotional deprivation, subjugation.

Healthy adult will attempt to place reasonable limits on this mode, soothing without judgment but placing limits on aggression.

The maladaptive coping modes

The vulnerable child is a key mode. It contains much of our negative feelings and is painful to be in. The schemas tell us these feelings are real so it cannot be avoided without the healthy adults soothing. But people will try and develop maladaptive coping modes below.

Compliant surrender

This mode gives into the schema and becomes compliant and dependent. In this mode you may believe negative things or try to accept them. You may stay in situations that make you feel worse like bad relationships as you feel you cannot have better for example or leave education as you feel incapable.

Healthy adult will attempt to challenge this mode, gently pushing it to actually meet the core emotional needs.

Detached/avoidant protector

This mode tries to use emotional detachment and avoidance to prevent pain. You may pull away from people, reject help, deny you are in pain, use substances to avoid feelings and more.

Healthy adult will attempt to challenge this mode, recognising that avoidance will just prevent the unmet need from being met.

Overcompensator

This mode tries to be the best to avoid feeling lesser. You may find yourself trying very hard to be the best or being self-aggrandising to avoid negative feelings.

Healthy adult will attempt to make you engage compassionately with yourself. You are not perfect and cannot be, but that is ok. You can still like yourself.

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