

APPENDIX I

MALADAPTIVE SCHEMAS

Schemas are an important component of the ABCDE practice outlined in Chapter 8. A schema is a deep mental filter—a core belief or emotional pattern your mind uses to make sense of yourself, other people, and the world. Maladaptive schemas are usually formed in childhood (as a result of traumas) and shape how you think, feel, and react, often without you realizing it. They are nasty little buggers, because they profoundly affect your mental system's predictive priors, attentional control/bias, and subsequent reactions. That means your brain will not only warp its fabrication of reality to fit the schema or otherwise make it true, it will also seek out and focus on *anything* that remotely resembles the schema and then freak out (trigger or hijack) whenever it believes it's found what it's looking for.

I read a story once of someone giving a presentation during a competition. Suffering from a failure schema, he noticed people rolling their eyes, falling asleep, and generally not paying much attention as he presented his work. Even the judges seemed disinterested. Wholly convinced he was failing miserably, he desperately wanted to walk off the stage...and nearly did! But it's a good thing he didn't, because then he wouldn't have won.

This is how schemas keep themselves “true.” In therapy, I’ve observed entire marriages, careers, and lives unnecessarily destroyed by schemas.

Psychologists have outlined 18 to 20 maladaptive schemas, depending on how they’re assessed and categorized. Listed below are the original 18 from Dr. Jeffrey Young’s book *Schema Therapy*. I describe them according to the ego function and associated core vulnerability, slightly different from the descriptions you may find in other sources.

Abandonment: This is the first of two schemas that seem to represent a more extreme version of the Emotional Deprivation schema (see below). The small self believes that not only will others fail to meet their needs, they will do so intentionally, which represents an abandonment. This confirms feelings of *aloneness* and even *inadequacy/unworthiness*.

Approval and Recognition-Seeking: The small self feels inadequate and, as such, excessively seeks approval, recognition, or even just attention from others, which can present as flamboyance and arrogance. The need for approval can be so strong that this person is willing to change in substantive ways to meet others’ expectations and get their attention.

Defectiveness/Shame: The small self feels *inadequate* and *powerless* and believes it is defective, inferior, unlovable, and/or shameful. This can arise as *impostor syndrome*—the feeling that one does not deserve to be in a certain position—accompanied by incessant comparison, hypersensitivity to outcomes or criticisms, and lots of blaming (projection defense).

Dependence/Incompetence: Being *insecure*, *powerless*, and *inade-*

quate, the small self believes it cannot handle life competently and frequently needs help navigating situations. More often than not, this arises as anxiety that can only be assuaged by another.

Emotional Deprivation: The small self sees itself as emotionally *fragile*, *insecure*, and *powerless*, relying on external support for nurturance, empathy, and protection. When these needs go unmet, it interprets the lack of support as confirmation of its isolation and powerlessness, often blaming its own perceived inadequacy or unworthiness. The flawed logic is that its needs would be met if it had value.

Emotional Inhibition: The small self feels *fragile* and *powerless*, so it believes emotions are unsafe to experience because it feels unable to control them. This feeling carries over to others (especially caregivers), assuming that person will also be unable to handle the emotions if expressed, so it inhibits both their experience and expression, respectively. This fear can be around specific categories of emotions such as anger or sadness, or it can apply equally to negative and positive emotions.

Enmeshment/Underdeveloped Self: In an attempt to feel less *alone*, *fragile/insecure*, *powerless*, and *inadequate*, the small self seeks emotional and psychological enmeshment with another person, even when doing so feels suffocating. Enmeshed individuals often lack an entirely separate identity. Enmeshed relationships can feel amazing and *appear* to function quite well, as long as neither party matures into an adult, which is why they usually fail.

Entitlement/Grandiosity: Intensely fearful of *inadequacy*, the small self instead compensates by believing that it is superior and, therefore, entitled to certain rights and privileges others don't deserve. These folks often seek to control inferior others and believe

that certain rules should not apply to them, given their superior status.

Failure: Being *inadequate* and *powerless*, the small self is terrified of the inevitable failures to come, which will prove it is deficient and inferior relative to peers. This schema often presents as being hyper-focused on achievement and success in arenas like school, sports, or work, which is a defense mechanism calculated to mask its perception of underlying inferiority. It can also present as an unwillingness to try difficult things. Though similar to the schema of Defectiveness/Shame, this schema focuses on more traditional, objective markers of “success” rather than the more subjective markers of social standing (or lack thereof) within particular groups.

Insufficient Self-Control and Self-Discipline: Being a helpless victim of *fragility* and *powerlessness*, the small self displays a pervasive inability to exercise self-control and restrict emotional impulses, even when failing to do so is likely to result in negative consequences. Immediate gratification is paramount to all other considerations. I’ve observed in several clients that this can even manifest as a sort of “ADHD light” condition, where a person who is otherwise capable of focus and discipline becomes unable to control their focus when it comes to a task they perceive as even moderately unpleasant.

Mistrust/Abuse: This is the second schema that seems to represent a more extreme version of the Emotional Deprivation schema. The small self believes that not only are others not going to meet their needs, they’re also going to intentionally harm it, and being largely *powerless*, the small self will be unable to prevent it.

Negativity/Pessimism: This schema feels like a surrender in that

the small self has become hyper-focused on the negative aspects of life experiences while simultaneously discounting or otherwise ignoring the positive aspects. Thus it surrenders to what it perceives as inevitable disappointment. This often presents as a fear of making mistakes or highly elevated expectations that guarantee the schema is frequently confirmed.

Punitiveness: The small self likely feels intense hatred of its own and others' inadequacy and powerlessness, so it exerts control over itself and others through harsh punishment. These folks often feel entitled or grandiose and present as angry, punitive, demeaning, and generally intolerant of others' behaviors, even when such intolerance is hypocritical.

Self-Sacrifice: Being *alone* and *fragile*, the small self voluntarily meets the perceived needs of others by sacrificing its own needs, desires, or emotions. These folks can be highly empathetic—a strength when harnessed skillfully. In this case, however, their empathy is often misplaced/misdirected, shifting the focus of suffering away from itself to become the helper instead of the vulnerable target. These folks pride themselves on being unselfish; however, their perceived unselfishness is often based on unperceived self-absorption, which is why their sacrifices often come with strings attached, like a demand for appreciation.

Social Isolation/Alienation: Having too many experiences that confirmed its *aloneness* and *inadequacy* through exclusion, rejection, or ostracization, the small self becomes genuinely convinced that it is alone in the world and unworthy of being included in a stable tribe, family, group, or community. This leaves them feeling hopelessly isolated and alienated.

Subjugation/Invalidation: The small self feels *inadequate* and

is terrified of being *alone*, so it excessively surrenders control out of fear of consequences or of being a burden to others. In doing so, the small self allows its needs to be suppressed or unmet in the service of what it perceives as higher-level priorities, such as acceptance or inclusion.

Unrelenting Standards/Hyper-Criticalness: Intensely fearing *inadequacy*, the small self strives incessantly to meet high standards that are unrealistic at best. These are the hard chargers who sacrifice pleasure, health, and wellbeing in service to the drive, often experiencing perfectionism, rigidity in thinking and rules, and a hyper-focus on efficiency and efficacy.

Vulnerability to Harm or Illness: Being *fragile/insecure* and *powerless*, the small self believes that it is always on the precipice of some kind of emotional, physical, or psychological tragedy.