

MALADAPTIVE SCHEMA MODES

Because you inadvertently clicked on, downloaded, and installed the schema malware detailed in Appendix I, your brain had to figure out how to navigate, stay safe, and hopefully thrive within the reality defined by the schema virus. To do that, it unconsciously developed maladaptive schema modes, which are patterns of belief, thought, speech, and action that help defend against a core vulnerability and all the resultant feelings. You can consider trauma as the cause of a schema and the schema as the cause of the mode that arose (to defend against the schema). They can be classified according to the standard ways our brains react to traumatizing situations and the emotions generated by them: fight, flight, and freeze.

Schema modes are an important component of the ABCDE practice outlined in Chapter 8. As shown in that chapter's example, the Perfectionist/Overcompensator mode became such an ingrained part of my identity, I'm still occasionally dealing with its harshly critical voice. It arose in response to a Defectiveness/Shame schema—a form of extreme self-doubt. I hope the fact that I'm still dealing with this schema and mode combination isn't discouraging, because it doesn't arise so powerfully and has little to no effect on my life. I see the beauty of it now. A part of my ego function wants to be seen as good, but it doubts itself. Sometimes

I'm gentle with it by trying to let it know it is good and loved. Other times, I just tell it to shut up.

The point is that you will have to determine what “working skillfully with the schemas and modes” means for you.

Innate Child Modes

Angry Child: This reactive mode is bitter, angry, and even vengeful because its core needs for safety, security, connection, and esteem are not being met by the world. The angry child can serve as a protector for the Vulnerable Child (see below) unless and until its anger results in negative consequences such as harsh punishment or rejection/abandonment.

Impulsive/Undisciplined Child: Another reactive mode, the impulsive child feels like a victim and, as such, feels entitled and believes that anything they need to do to alleviate the suffering of the Vulnerable Child (see below) is acceptable regardless of longer-term consequences. They frequently present anger toward anyone who tries to interfere with their pleasure chasing, as if they need to shout at people, “You don’t understand, *I’m* the victim here!”

Vulnerable Child: This mode is lonely, sad, vulnerable, inadequate, and insecure and is installed as soon as the mind identifies with the ego function and defines itself as such. This is the “inner child” that pop psychology and many therapists refer to.

Maladaptive Fight Modes

Bully Attacker: This small self defends by lashing out at others or demeaning them to make themselves appear (and feel) superior.

Perfectionist/Overcompensator: This small self attempts to be perfect so that others will more likely meet its needs and confirm its value.

Self-Aggrandizer: This small self can't wait to give you their resume and inflates themselves to ensure others know their value.

Suspicious Overcontroller: This small self is very untrusting of others and situations in general and is often a defense against the severe anxiety that results from feeling powerless.

Maladaptive Flight Modes

Angry Protector: This small self displays aggression to keep troublesome people out of its territory.

Avoidant Protector: This small self avoids situations and people that may trigger distress that exceeds its perceived capabilities.

Complaining Protector: This small self blames everyone and everything else to avoid feeling its vulnerabilities; complaining may also provide some semblance of control over others.

Detached Protector: This small self suppresses feelings and thoughts that are threatening. Note that this is *psychological* avoidance, as opposed to the behavioral/situational avoidance of the Avoidant Protector.

Detached Self-Soother: This small self soothes itself by detaching from feelings by whatever means necessary, often via addictions of myriad varieties: incessant thinking, doomscrolling, media consumption, drugs and alcohol, sex, and gambling. I see this mode in Western society more than others, especially among younger generations.

Maladaptive Freeze Modes

Compliant Surrenderer: This small self is the people pleaser who eagerly surrenders their will to others in a (usually) unsuccessful attempt at having their needs met by others.

Maladaptive Parent Modes

Demanding/Critical Parent: This small self strives for perfection in all matters and often demands that they and all others achieve lest they be deemed worthless. They can rule with an iron fist and are often highly inflexible (because they're right, of course).

Punitive Parent: This small self likely internalized the blame and punishment they received from others and now regularly unleashes it on themselves, others, or (usually) both. This mode refers to the way in which rules and norms are enforced—through punishment of various sorts.