

## **Maladaptive Schemas (18)**

### [The Ultimate Guide to Early Maladaptive Schemas \[Full List\]](#)

Every single one of us has a schema, or a “lens” that we view the world through. This “lens” is usually created based on our previous experiences or the ways we were raised in our childhood. Jeffery Young established schema therapy in the 1980’s, with the intention of having patients work with a therapist to identify and change their maladaptive ways of thinking. I wanted to share these 18 schemas with each of you so that you can at least be INTRODUCED to them. A good test for identifying your own schemas can be found [HERE](#). I challenge each of you to identify your own patterns of disordered thinking, and recognize how they might relate to maladaptive coping mechanisms (like binge eating).

Note: I give a VERY brief overview of each schema, the link at the top does a fantastic job of going more in detail about each schema.

### **Category: Disconnection and Rejection**

The overall expectation that one’s needs for safety & stability, nurturance, or sharing of feelings will not be met in a predictable manner. Most people with one of these attachment disorders have a difficult time forming secure bonds with others. Normally people who develop these come from families who may have been cold, unpredictable, or abusive.

#### **Abandonment**

- Defined by perceived instability or unreliability of others. Fear that connections will abandon the individual in favor of something better. Often leads to unstable relationships and angry outbursts. Usually seen in BPD.

#### **Mistrust/Abuse**

- Involves the belief that others will manipulate or take advantage. Idea that the individual usually gets “the short end of the stick”. Usually suspicious or paranoid persons.

#### **Emotional Deprivation**

- The expectation that others will not meet their needs for emotional support. Three forms of deprivation include:
  - 1) Deprivation of nurturance: absence of attention, affection, companionship
  - 2) Deprivation of empathy: absence of understanding, listening, sharing of feelings from others
  - 3) Deprivation of protection: Absence of strength, direction, or guidance from others

### **Defectiveness/shame**

- The feeling that one is defective, bad, unwanted, unloveable. Hypersensitive to criticism and blame.

### **Social Isolation**

- The feeling that one is different from everyone else and not part of any group or community.

## **Category: Impaired Autonomy and Performance**

Usually found in individuals who feel a lack of sense of self. They have not formed a stable perception of who they are and how they may function as independent individuals. Typically people who develop one of these schemas may come from overprotective families, those who fail to praise the child for performing competently on their own, or those where a parent has made most life decisions for the child.

### **Dependence/Incompetence**

- The belief that one is unable to handle daily tasks, make decisions, or form adequate judgements on their own.

### **Vulnerability to Harm/Illness**

- Constant fear that something bad is going to happen. Usually afraid of events like becoming mentally or physically ill, or being involved in an environmental catastrophe.

### **Enmeshment/Undeveloped self**

- Very close emotional involvement with a significant other (usually parent). One might feel as if they could not survive or be happy without this person. Usually underdeveloped socialization skills with others and feelings of emptiness accompany this schema.

### **Failure**

- The belief that one has failed, will inevitably fail, or is fundamentally inadequate relative to their peers. Often involves the belief that one is stupid or inept and will be less successful than others.

## Category: Impaired Limits

Difficulty in internal limits, respecting others, and setting long-term goals. Those with one of these schemas often have trouble cooperating with others, making commitments, or setting realistic goals. Typically they come from families who engage in overindulgence, and the child may not have been pushed to tolerate normal levels of discomfort, or may not have been given adequate supervision, direction, or guidance.

### Entitlement/Grandiosity

- The belief that one is superior to other people, and entitled to special rights and privileges. Exaggerated focus on superiority in order to achieve power or control. Sometimes these individuals do not appear to demonstrate empathy for others needs or feelings.

### Insufficient self-control/self-discipline

- Difficulty exercising self-control and discipline when trying to achieve personal goals. These individuals are usually impulsive, unreliable, disorganized and may have excessive expression of their emotions. They may want to change their behavior but feel like they have no control over their actions and impulses.

## Category: Other Directedness

Excessive focus on desires, feelings, and responses of others at the expense of one's own needs. Suppression of one's own angry and natural inclinations. Typically individuals with one of these schemas come from families who show conditional love and acceptance. Parents' emotional needs and desires or social acceptance and status may have been valued more than the needs of the child.

### Subjugation

- Excessive surrendering of control to others. Usually excessive compliance accompanied with the feeling of being trapped, leading to a build up of anger and maladaptive coping (passive-aggressive behavior, withdrawal of affection, substance abuse).

## **Self-sacrifice**

- Voluntarily meeting the needs of others at the expense of one's self. Usually to prevent others from feeling pain, to avoid guilt from feeling selfish, or to maintain the connection with others that may be perceived as needy. One's own needs may not be adequately being met and usually a resentment for those being taken care of follows.

## **Approval/recognition-seeking**

- Emphasis on gaining approval or attention from others. Usually focused on fitting in at the expense of developing a true sense of self. Often includes overemphasis on status, appearance and approval. Hypersensitivity to rejection.

## **Over Vigilance & Inhibition**

Emphasis on suppressing one's spontaneous feelings. Individuals with these schemas often have rigid internalized rules and expectations about performance and ethical behavior at the expense of happiness, self-expression, relaxation, and close relationships. Generally pessimistic. Typically these individuals may have come from families that were demanding, put a high value on perfectionism, following rules, and hiding emotions.

## **Negativity/Pessimism**

- General focus on the negative aspects of life such as pain, death, disappointment, conflict, etc. Usually accompanied with the idea that things will go wrong and one's life will eventually fall apart. Fear of making mistakes.

## **Emotional Inhibition**

- Usually self-conscious of anger and aggression, positive impulses (joy, affection, sexual excitement), or vulnerability (communicating feelings or needs). These individuals may have an excessive emphasis on rational thinking, disregarding emotions.

## Unrelenting Standards

- Underlying belief that one must meet the very high standards they set for themselves. Usually results in difficulty “slowing down” and hypercriticism towards oneself and others. Individuals may be preoccupied with time and efficiency. Often comes with impairment with the ability to relax, experience pleasure, and feel satisfaction towards accomplishments.

## Punitiveness

- The belief that people should be harshly punished for their mistakes. Individuals tend to be angry, intolerant, and impatient. Difficulty forgiving mistakes in oneself or others.

## Resources

Ball, Samuel A. “Manualized treatment for substance abusers with personality disorders.” *Addictive Behaviors*, vol. 23, no. 6, Nov. 1998, pp. 883–891, [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0306-4603\(98\)00067-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0306-4603(98)00067-7).

Team. “The Ultimate Guide to Early Maladaptive Schemas [Full List].” *Attachment Project*, 14 June 2024, [www.attachmentproject.com/blog/early-maladaptive-schemas/](http://www.attachmentproject.com/blog/early-maladaptive-schemas/).