



# SCHEMA THERAPY – SCHEMA MODES

**S**chema Modes are momentary mind states which every human being experiences at one time or another. A Schema Mode consists of a cluster of schemas and coping styles.

Life situations that a person finds disturbing or offensive, or arouse bad memories, are referred to as "triggers" that tend to activate Schema Modes.

In psychologically healthy persons, Schema Modes are mild, flexible mind states that are easily pacified by the rest of their personality.

In patients with personality disorders, Schema Modes are more severe, rigid mind states that may seem split off from the rest of their personality.

## Identified Schema Modes

Young, Klosko & Weishaar (2003) identified 10 Schema Modes grouped into four categories:

- 1 Child modes
- 2 Dysfunctional Coping modes
- 3 Dysfunctional Parent modes
- 4 Healthy Adult mode

The four **Child modes** are:

- 1 Vulnerable Child
- 2 Angry Child
- 3 Impulsive/Undisciplined Child
- 4 Happy Child

The three **Dysfunctional Coping modes** are:

- 1 Compliant Surrenderer
- 2 Detached Protector
- 3 Overcompensator

The two **Dysfunctional Parent modes** are:

- 1 Punitive Parent
- 2 Demanding Parent

## ANGRY CHILD MODE

**Angry Child** is fuelled mainly by feelings of victimization or bitterness, leading towards negativity, pessimism, jealousy, and rage.

While experiencing this schema mode, a patient may have urges to yell, scream, throw/break things, or possibly even injure themselves or harm others.

The **Angry Child schema mode** is:

- ⇒ Enraged
- ⇒ Anxious
- ⇒ Frustrated
- ⇒ Self-doubting
- ⇒ Feels unsupported in ideas
- ⇒ Vulnerable



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## **I**MPULSIVE CHILD MODE

**Impulsive Child** is the mode where anything goes. Behaviours of the **Impulsive Child schema mode** may include:

- ⇒ Reckless driving
- ⇒ Substance abuse
- ⇒ Cutting oneself
- ⇒ Suicidal thoughts
- ⇒ Gambling
- ⇒ Fits of rage such as punching a wall when "triggered"
- ⇒ Laying blame of circumstantial difficulties upon innocent people

Unsafe sex, rash decisions to run away from a situation without resolution, tantrums perceived by peers as infantile and so forth are a mere few of the behaviours which a patient in this schema mode might display.

Impulsive Child is the rebellious and careless schema mode.

## **A**BANDONED CHILD MODE

**Abandoned Child** is the mode in which a patient may feel defective in some way, thrown aside, unloved, obviously alone, or may be in a "me against the world" mindset.

The patient may feel as though peers, friends, family, and even the entire world have abandoned them.

Stated simply, patients become numb in order to protect themselves from the harm or stress of what they fear is to come, or to protect themselves from fear of the unknown in general.

Behaviours of patients in **Abandoned Child mode** may include (but are not limited to):

- ⇒ Falling into major depression
- ⇒ Pessimism
- ⇒ Feeling unwanted
- ⇒ Feeling unworthy of love
- ⇒ Perceiving personality traits as irredeemable flaws

Rarely, a patient's self-perceived flaws may be intentionally withheld on the inside; when this occurs, instead of showing one's true self, the patient may appear to others as "egotistical", "attention-seeking", selfish, distant, and may exhibit behaviours unlike their true nature.

The patient might create a narcissistic alter-ego/persona in order to escape or hide the insecurity from others. Due to fear of rejection, of feeling disconnected from their true self and poor self-image, these patients, who truly desire companionship/affection, may instead end up pushing others away.

## **D**ETACHED PROTECTOR MODE

**Detached Protector** is based in escape. Patients in **Detached Protector schema mode**:

- ⇒ Withdraw
- ⇒ Dissociate
- ⇒ Alienate
- ⇒ Hide in some way

This may be triggered by numerous stress factors or feelings of being overwhelmed. When a patient with insufficient skills is in a situation involving excessive demands, it can trigger a Detached Protector response mode.



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## **P**UNITIVE PARENT MODE

**Punitive Parent** is identified by beliefs of a patient that:

they should be harshly punished, perhaps due to feeling "defective", or making a simple mistake.

The patient may feel that they should be punished for even existing.

- ⇒ Sadness
- ⇒ Anger
- ⇒ Impatience
- ⇒ Judgment

are directed to the patient and from the patient.

The **Punitive Parent** has great difficulty in forgiving themselves even under average circumstances in which anyone could fall short of their standards.

The **Punitive Parent** does not wish to allow for human error or imperfection, thus punishment is what this mode seeks.

## **H**EALTHY ADULT MODE

**Healthy Adult** is the mode that schema therapy aims to help a patient achieve as the long-lasting state of well-being.

The **Healthy Adult** is:

- ⇒ Comfortable making decisions
- ⇒ A problem-solver
- ⇒ Thinks before acting
- ⇒ Appropriately ambitious
- ⇒ Sets limits and boundaries
- ⇒ Nurtures self and others
- ⇒ Forms healthy relationships
- ⇒ Takes on all responsibility
- ⇒ Sees things through
- ⇒ Enjoys/partakes in enjoyable adult activities and interests with boundaries enforced
- ⇒ Takes care of their physical health
- ⇒ Values themselves

In this schema mode the patient focuses on the present day with hope and strives toward the best tomorrow possible.

The **Healthy Adult** forgives the past, no longer sees themselves as a victim (but as a survivor), and expresses all emotions in ways which are healthy and cause no harm.

[Reference: Young, Jeffrey E; Klosko, Janet S; Weishaar, Marjorie E (2003). *Schema therapy: a practitioner's guide*. New York: Guilford Press. ISBN 9781593853723]