

ENDING SELF-DEFEATING PATTERNS

Cognitive therapists and psychologists focus on self-defeating patterns of thinking that rule our lives. Often these patterns are learned in childhood from experiences with our families, friends and teachers. These thinking patterns or “schemas”, as they are often called, can continue to haunt us in adulthood and guide our thoughts and actions.

Schemas operate on automatic. We use our schemas without even realizing it. However, they are not subconscious (or buried in the layers of our mind). We can become *mindful* or self-aware simply by wishing to be. As children, these schemas may have helped us cope and survive with critical parents or chaotic families, but as adults, they are usually no longer beneficial.

- **Mistrust** : Constant suspicion of other people’s motives.

Hallmarks: Frequent arguments over perceived slights
 Quickness to anger
 Suspecting an ulterior motive whenever someone does something nice
 Idealizing others and then turning against them for minor disappointments
 Being drawn to abusive relationships

- **Deprivation** : The belief that no one really cares about you and that your needs will never be met.

Hallmarks: Feeling hopeless
 Making aggressive demands
 Attacking anyone who lets you down – or doing the opposite
 Going out of your way to do favors
 Overindulging by spending more than you can afford or eating more than is healthy

- **Abandonment**: The fear that you will always be left alone or that you will lose everyone in your life that matters to you.

Hallmarks: Clinging to others in such a way that you drive interested people away
Constant worry about the future of relationships
Fear of rocking the boat
Leaving someone before he/she leaves you

- **Unlovability:** Feeling fundamentally defective or inferior

Hallmarks: Fear that people will reject you once they get to know you
Being easily ashamed or humiliated
Avoiding drawing attention to yourself –or the opposite—
Obsessively seeking attention or public recognition

- **Entitlement:** Believing that you don't have to follow the same rules as the rest of the world

Hallmarks: Acting impulsively and selfishly on your whims
Exaggerating your abilities
Putting down others' intellect, finding fault with others
Feeling irritated when others set reasonable limits or say no

- **Vulnerability:** The thought that danger lies around every corner.

Hallmarks: Constant worry over money, health and/or physical safety
Overpreparing for things
Phobias – or the opposite-- extreme risktaking
Avoiding new opportunities, making excuses why not to try

- **Failure:** The belief that you are incompetent or unable to reach your goals.

Hallmarks: Achievements are accompanied by sadness or the feeling that success is undeserved.
Constant self-doubt
Feeling like a fraud
Avoiding new challenges
Staying in stale, unsatisfying choices

- **Perfectionism:** Driving yourself to attempt perfection or unreasonable standards in even the most minor of things.

Hallmarks: Focusing on what is wrong rather than what is right
Working very long hours

Stress-based disorder such as tension headaches, GI upset
Starving yourself
Being harshly critical of yourself and others

- **Social exclusion:** The thought that you don't belong.

Hallmarks: Anxiety in groups or in rooms with strangers
Being overly self-conscious about fitting in
Experiencing deep sadness about being alone
Social awkwardness
Exaggerating the outcast role by removing yourself from circles of people
Blaming others for "excluding you" when you fail to take the initiative to be connected and involved
"Glorying" in being different

Change These Patterns

Become mindful—Become aware of your favorite self-defeating schemas. What has been automatic can become unnatural if you focus your energy on recognizing when these thoughts are guiding you, or rather, *mis*guiding you. When you are mindful, you simply observe your emotions and thoughts without getting caught up in them or being ruled by them. Then you will not act blindly.

If you have difficulty recognizing the thoughts, simply stop yourself when you are in a bad mood. Trace you thinking back five minutes. The pesky thought is there if you retrace your thinking backwards.

Change the schema—Reverse the trend by taking on an alternative way of looking at situations.

- Maybe danger is not lurking around every corner
- Maybe others can meet your needs if you do not prevent them
- Maybe you can do things without being rigid about your standards

Lag time—As you learn to give up old schemas, you may act upon them first and not realize it until hours later. This is the normal lag time that occurs when you are changing. Don't be discouraged. Be determined to catch yourself earlier...and you will.