

# Schema Exercises

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Completing the exercises below will decrease and eliminate schemas. The goal is to recognize and stop the schemas automatically in real life settings.

**1. The Cognitive Exercise** - The Cognitive Exercise can be approached in two ways. First, think about a time when one of your known schemas was activated. Use this memory to complete the exercise by filling in the blanks of the sentence below. Second, think of a recent time that you felt a negative emotion. After noticing this, identify the triggering event leading to the negative emotion and complete the exercise.

This **(causal event)** makes me feel **(emotion)** and I feel this emotion in **(this part of my body)**. This event has triggered my **(schema)** and has caused me to want to do **(a fight, flight or freeze coping behavior)**. The coping behavior provides for me both **(coping behavior advantages and disadvantages.)** Although my schema causes me to inaccurately believe that I am **(a negative self-belief)**, I really am **(a rational positive self-belief)** as evidenced by **(supporting evidence in your life of the positive self-belief)**. Although my schema and negative self-belief cause me to do or want to do **(the negative coping behavior listed above)** instead I will use a picture of myself fully believing my realistic positive self-belief to help me to do **(a new positive behavior)**.

**2. The Imagery and Safety Exercise** - Refer to the completed cognitive exercise above and complete the following steps listed below.

A. See a picture of yourself experiencing the causal event and having the schema activated.

B. Notice your listed coping behavior and ask yourself "As a child, when did it make sense for me to do this coping behavior?". Recognize that coping methods developed in childhood are reasonable reactions in response to a lack of power and perhaps also the negative behavior of a parent.

C. After identifying the reason for the development of the coping behavior, answer these questions.

1. How did these events leading to the development of the coping response make me feel as a child?

2. Who is responsible for creating the situation leading to the negative emotions I had when this coping behavior began?

3. What did I need during this past time to feel safe?

D. Next imagine an adult version of yourself coming from a safe place and entering this childhood scene. Imagine the adult version of yourself helping the child feel safe. Imagine the child feels that safety and then makes choices for how to deal with the causal event in the cognitive exercise. Imagine the child has the power of an adult and can do anything he or she wants to resolve the situation. Imagine that child follows through with the plan successfully. Notice how that makes you feel as the child succeeds.

**3. The Mindful Observer Exercise** - Refer to the completed cognitive exercise above and complete the following steps.

A. Imagine you are sitting at a table as your adult self and knowledgeable of the information in the completed cognitive exercise. See the memory of yourself sitting on the other side of the table experiencing the causal event and having the schema activated. Sitting at the table, watch yourself beginning to act out the coping behavior.

B. As you imagine this from your adult observing self, notice how your observing self is less emotional than the experiencing self.

C. Imagine you move across the table from the adult observing position and you inhabit the body of your self experiencing the schema. Notice how this change brings negative emotions and negative body sensations. Sit with this for 10-15 seconds.

D. Pull away from the experiencing self and returning to your observing self. Notice how your emotions and body sensations return to calm. Understand that this illustrates how you have control over your emotions and related body sensations. You are not the schema.

E. Returning to your chair in the adult observing position, imagine you begin to give the experiencing self advice for how to solve the causal event. Do this based upon what the observing self sees as **important** and what the observing self **values**. Imaging the experiencing self using this advice. Begin to imagine how this will change the coping behavior.

**4. The Expression and Personal Rights Exercise** – Refer to the cognitive exercise or any other situation where you have a personal conflict or a negative relational memory of childhood.

A. Imagine an adult version of yourself sitting in a neutral room talking to the person with whom you are in conflict or a childhood memory of a conflict or disappointment with a parent or caregiver.

B. Imagine you have the power and safety to express your feelings and what you want. Begin to express emotions and needs based on the rights to which all people are entitled. For example, we all have the right to express emotions, to be heard, understood, validated, protected, and accepted as we are.

C. Do this expression for the purpose of venting but especially to talk down the schema. Notice that the schema cannot exist in the room where you are expressing feelings and needs.

D. Rehearse this expression through the day. Imagine the other person hearing you and responding appropriately. Notice the imagined and possible changes in behavior in yourself and the other.

**5. The Behavioral Strategies Exercise** – Behavioral strategies are applied to the repetitive negative coping behaviors found in the cognitive exercise.

A. After doing the cognitive exercise several times, notice the negative coping behaviors that are causing the most problems. Address these problems first. Make a point to change behaviors not life decisions.

B. Link the negative behavior to childhood causes and/or schemas rather than a personality flaw. For example, notice that the behavior has more to do with the existence of the schema and that the schema was developed for a rational reason outside of your control.

C. Identify the blocks to change. Are the blocks to change based on fear of change? Are the blocks created by an outside pressure or influence from a person(s) in your life?

D. Have a dialogue between the blocked self and the healthy self. Have your healthy self begin to teach and direct the blocked self to act differently. The healthy self can act like a parent, teacher, coach, director.

E. Imagery yourself doing the suggested changed behavior. Imagine the related successes and overcoming challenges.