

Schema Mismatches

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Emotional Deprivation
and Emotional Inhibition

Ruth Holt, Schema Couples Therapy Australia

What this looks like in couples

Emotional Deprivation Schema

This schema impacts your sense of what's possible. It feels like your desire for a normal degree of emotional support will not be adequately met by others. The three major forms of deprivation are:

- a. Deprivation of Nurture: a lack of attention, affection, warmth, or companionship
- b. Deprivation of Empathy: a lack of understanding, listening, self-disclosure, or mutual sharing of feelings from others
- c. Deprivation of Protection: a lack of strength, direction, or guidance from others

In a couple relationship you may turn away from your partner when distressed or become angry when they try to emotionally support you. You may have an attraction pattern for someone who is very emotionally unavailable, or lacking emotional skills.

What is 1 way I know when this schema is activated? A shift in my body, a feeling, thoughts?

Emotional Inhibition Schema

This schema inhibits spontaneous action, feeling, or communication - usually to avoid disapproval from others, feelings of shame, or losing control of your impulses. The most common areas of inhibition involve:

- a. shutting down feelings of anger & aggression
- b. avoiding positive impulses (e.g., joy, affection, sexual excitement, play)
- c. having difficulty expressing vulnerability or communicating freely about your feelings, needs, etc., or
- d. excessive emphasis on rationality while disregarding emotions

In a couple relationship you may avoid any 'emotional' conversations because it feels unsafe or you feel ill equipped. You may judge your more-emotional-partner as illogical or 'too much'. You may be attracted to someone who is very in touch with their emotions or very sensitive, but then find them too demanding of you to be the same.

What is 1 way I know when this schema is activated? A shift in my body, a feeling, thoughts?

What can we do?

1. Talk together about where you learnt your schemas - were they modelled in your family or by a person growing up? Where and when did you learn to shut down your needs for support/ for expression? Finish this sentence "when I was little I learned that ..."

2. Talk about how these schemas play out in your current relationship - be gentle! and remember that if things get too heated you can take a break, but make sure you commit to coming back when things are calmer. When do the schemas get activated? e.g. when we talk about certain topics, when one of us is feeling upset or hurt, when we are tired, whenever we talk ...
3. Develop a sign when these schemas get activated - can you have a word e.g. "schemas!", or a sign that you use when you feel the schema getting activated?
4. Share what you need - In those times when it feels unsafe or too hard to be open about your needs or express emotion, what would you ideally need from your partner? What would they say, or not say?

Make a Plan

Write down what you want to do differently next time this schema mismatch happens - you could even have a note written with the words from step 4 above to remind you what to say. If you feel too flooded in that moment make a commitment to handing the note to your partner.

Schemas are great at blocking connection!



Even when you have a plan to start to connect more, your schemas will get in the way! When your partner tries to provide support the ED schema will get activated and you might get angry, shut down or be critical of their attempts, feeling like it's not exactly what you want or need (it's not hitting the *bull's eye* - and it probably isn't!) which will probably discourage your partner and they may stop trying (leaving you more deprived than before). Instead, try to remind yourself that it's *in the ball park* of what you need and let in their support. You could even say "that's helpful, but it would be more helpful if you could ... " then let in the love they are offering, even if it's not exactly what you need. You might need to repeat to yourself "*ball park, not bull's eye*".



One of the challenges with an EI schema is that it often says "this is the way I am". While there is likely some 'hard wiring' involved (see the note below), there is also a lot of learning that emotions are dangerous, 'not me', embarrassing, or necessary to avoid. However, all humans have emotions and are wired for connection. When you share your emotional world you create connection. So, learning how to be vulnerable is worth the effort to build the intimacy you need. This takes courage and you may need your partner to encourage you as you give it a go sharing what you feel. You also might need to remind yourself that expressing feelings is new, not bad.

A note on temperament and trauma

These schemas come from a unique interaction with your natural temperament, neurobiology and environment growing up (which may have included trauma). Often with this kind of schema mismatch, one person is, by temperament, highly sensitive. The other may be less expressive by temperament or neurobiology. You can't completely change the other person, but you **can** learn to meet your partner's needs. The fact you are willing to try shows a depth of love that is there, in spite of your 'hard wiring'. When trauma has been part of your history, it is important to get support from your therapist to work through the impact of that, before trying the steps above.