

# Schema Mismatches



Self Sacrifice/  
Subjugation and  
Entitlement

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## What this looks like in couples

<b>Self Sacrifice and Subjugation Schemas</b>	<p>The Self-Sacrifice schema focuses you excessively on meeting the needs of others in daily situations, at the expense of yourself. The most common reasons people self-sacrifice are: to prevent causing pain to others; to avoid guilt from feeling selfish; or to maintain the connection with others who are needy.</p> <p>The Subjugation schema has a sense of powerlessness where you suppress your needs, preferences, desires or emotions – usually to avoid anger, retaliation, or abandonment.</p> <p>In a couple relationship these schemas result in always looking out for your partner and being hyper attuned to their needs and preferences, which sounds like a good thing! But often there is resentment building, or you feel unseen. You may have an attraction pattern for someone who is used to/expects to have someone look after them and who is very able to assert what they want and need and less interested in your preferences.</p> <p>What is 1 way I know when this schema is activated? A shift in my body, a feeling, thoughts?</p>
<b>Entitlement Schema</b>	<p>The Entitlement schema tells you that you are right and superior to others, entitled to special rights and privileges or not bound by the rules of reciprocity that guide normal social interactions. The Entitlement schema asserts preferences without reciprocity and has a superior feeling. This feeling of being in control and “right” can be a way of staying safe or having a sense of being good enough.</p> <p>In a couple relationship you may dominate your partner, be critical or contemptuous, wanting them to "toughen up" or feeling the need to educate them. You may be attracted to someone who has a tendency to compliance and backing down quickly, but then find them annoyingly "weak".</p> <p>What is 1 way I know when this schema is activated? A shift in my body, a feeling, thoughts?</p>

## 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 and take care of others, or where was it important to always be the 'top dog'? Finish this sentence "when I was little I learned that ..."
2. These schemas are often compensating for something. Ask yourself "if I was never allowed to use this schema again what would that be like?" What feelings/fears/hurts come up?
3. Talk about how these schemas play out in your current relationship - be gentle and encourage the sacrificing/subjugating partner to go first! If things get too heated you can take a break, but make

- sure you commit to coming back when things are calmer. When do these schemas get activated?
4. 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?
  5. Share what you need - In those times when you are tempted to go into your schema mismatch dance, 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 5 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!



When you have been subjugating and sacrificing for a long time it can be so instinctual, that it's hard to catch. Often you have learned from a young age to regulate a significant other or earn their connection by putting your needs last. What would you want to say to that younger self? Do they feel like they matter? What do they need to hear from your Healthy Adult?

One of the best ways to begin change is to start to notice the urge to jump in and agree, resolve the tension or give in and instead PAUSE. Take 10 seconds (count them!) before responding. You could also stop saying 'yes' at all, instead say "let me think about it and get back to you". Remember that there may be an underlying schema that will get activated if you start to change this pattern, perhaps abandonment, mistrust, defectiveness ... so you may need therapy support with schema change.



Entitlement can be a useful approach in some settings, but in a couple it creates a power dynamic that reduces connection and increases isolation. It's like a castle, where you can be 'right' and strong, but it takes a lot of energy being the king of the castle. It can also end up alienating and hurting your partner, who can feel undermined and devalued by this schema. A courageous task is to let down the drawbridge, ask your partner to tell you the impact this schema has on them, without trying to defend yourself (or tell them they are wrong!). Resist the temptation to defend your position, and instead say "tell me more". Because there may be some pain that your Entitlement is protecting you from feeling, climbing off the throne may need some therapy help.

## 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 and experience highly sensitive to others. The other may be less attuned by temperament or neurobiology. You can't completely change the other person, but you **can** learn to meet your own and your partner's needs. The fact you are willing to rebalance the power dynamic in spite of your 'hard wiring', shows that you can see that you both matter. If trauma is in your history, therapy to work through the impact of that may be the first step.