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How effective is Schema Therapy?

Schema therapy has been evaluated and found to be effective for people with

- personality disorders
- other long-term, complex, psychological problems, including chronic depression, anxiety, and persistent relationship difficulties.

Service users who have benefited most are those who felt their problems had troubled them for many years, for as long as they could remember, or had always been there to some degree.

Other useful information

'Reinventing Your Life: The Breakthrough Program to End Negative Behaviour...and feel great again' by Jeffrey Young and Janet Klosko (1993) Penguin Books

Website:

www.cognitivetherapy.me.uk/schematherapy

Contact us

For more information about Schema Therapy, please ask to speak to the psychological therapies services manager in your area.

For information on Trust services visit www.awp.nhs.uk

PALS

To make a comment, raise a concern or make a complaint, please contact the Trust's Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS).

Tel: 01225 362900

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Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership
NHS Trust

Schema Therapy

This is one of a series of information leaflets on psychological therapies for service users. The therapy is described, what it involves, and the kinds of problem it may be helpful for.

You matter, we care

What is Schema Therapy?

Schema therapy is a form of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT). It seeks to identify what is known as 'schemas'.

Schemas are self-defeating, themes or patterns that we keep repeating throughout our lives.

Some examples of common schemas and their effects are:

- Failure – a sense that you are incompetent compared to others.
- Emotional deprivation – a sense that no one will ever understand you, or care about your needs.
- Mistrust – a sense that other people will hurt, betray or reject you.
- Social isolation – a sense that you don't fit in, or don't belong.

It is believed that schemas develop when childhood needs are not met. Because they tend to begin early in life, schemas become familiar and comfortable. To keep our schemas going, we can distort our view of events in our lives.

Schemas may also remain dormant until they are activated by situations relevant to that particular schema. You may have felt you were coping well until that point.

What are coping styles?

People cope with their schemas in different ways. This is partly because we have different temperaments at birth.

Unconsciously, we may also choose one or other of our parents (or a significant adult) to "copy" or model ourselves on.

Schema therapy sees coping styles as normal attempts on the part of the child to survive in a difficult environment. But unfortunately, we keep repeating them throughout adulthood, even when we no longer need them for survival.

They can then become destructive or even life-limiting and can lead us to act in ways that end up blocking our development.

For example, we may become very rigid and stubborn, isolate ourselves from other people, drink alcohol or eat excessively, block our emotions, mistreat other people, or become a perfectionist.

What does Schema therapy involve?

The purpose of Schema therapy is to help people:

- identify their early schemas, and link them to their life history and current problems
- identify and then stop using unhelpful coping styles and so get back in touch with their core feelings.

Once your schemas and coping styles have been identified, a schema therapist can help you to make changes by:

- restructuring your thinking patterns relating to your schemas
- practicing exercises to vent your feelings and express early pain
- practicing other more healthy coping styles when schemas are triggered.

Could I benefit?

You may find Schema therapy helpful if any of the following apply to you:

- You are drawn to the same type of partner over and over, but your needs aren't met.
- You overreact to the same kind of situation.
- You are stuck in some area of your life that you can't seem to change.
- You have low self-confidence.
- You are in constant conflict in your relationships.