Introduction to Schema Modes

> A **schema mode** is the set of schemas or schema operations—adaptive or maladaptive—that are currently active for an individual. A dysfunctional schema mode is activated when specific maladaptive schemas or coping responses have erupted into distressing emotions, avoidance responses, or self-defeating behaviors that take over and control an individual's functioning.

❖ **Child Modes**
  ➢ **Vulnerable Child**: As children, we are inherently vulnerable. Our physical vulnerability may diminish as we grow, but our emotional vulnerability never leaves us. This mode refers to our perpetual inner child that can always feel vulnerable. This mode is at the core of Schema Therapy as the most important mode.
    ▪ **Therapy Goals:** 1) Learn what your vulnerable child needs to feel safe and wanted. 2) Learn how to soothe yourself when you are feeling vulnerable. 3) Practice acting differently towards your vulnerability.

  ➢ **Angry Child**: This mode is activated when we sense that the needs of our vulnerable child have not been met. The function of this mode is to get noticed by others—using anger to draw attention.
    ▪ **Therapy Goals:** 1) Notice the signs that you are becoming angry, especially if it is internalized. 2) Express your feelings in a way that does not cause harm to people or things. 3) Take action to soothe the underlaying vulnerability and unmet needs.

❖ **Maladaptive Coping Modes**
  ➢ **Overcompensation**
    ▪ **Perfectionistic Overcompensator**: The need to be perfect in everything so that we don't show our vulnerability to others.
      ○ **Thoughts**: "I have to do it right," "I can't delegate," "It must be perfect," "It's not good enough."
      ○ **Behaviors**: Over-planning, writing lists, procrastinating, self-critical
      ○ **Schemas**: Failure, defectiveness, unrelenting standards, approval-seeking
    ▪ **Suspicious Overcontroller**: The need to constantly be looking for threats. This may manifest as hypervigilance, contingency planning, making all the decisions, or using rituals/repetitive behaviors to feel like we're coping.
      ○ **Thoughts**: "No one can be trusted," "Nothing is safe," "Others can't see the dangers that I can."
      ○ **Behaviors**: Micromanaging, checking, monitoring, hypervigilance
      ○ **Schemas**: Mistrust/Abuse, negativity, vulnerability to harm/illness
    ▪ **Self-Aggrandizer**: The need to emphasize or exaggerate positive qualities or abilities to deflect attention away from or vulnerability.
      ○ **Thoughts**: "I'm better than you," "I'm above the rules," "I need to be special to be seen."
      ○ **Behaviors**: Showing off, bragging, denying faults, hyperbole
      ○ **Schemas**: Entitlement, approval seeking, mistrust/abuse, abandonment
    ▪ **Bully/Attack**: A need to defend ourselves by lashing out at others—cutting them down so we look better in comparison or so they learn to leave us alone.
      ○ **Thoughts**: "I need to be intimidating to make others comply," "If I kick you down, then I will rise up."
      ○ **Behaviors**: Criticizing others, humiliating others, false accusations, intimidation tactics
      ○ **Schemas**: Punitiveness, insufficient self-control, entitlement, mistrust/abuse.

  ➢ **Avoidance**
    ▪ **Detached Protector:** A form of psychological avoidance where we detach from our feelings and what is going on around us so that we don't have to feel our vulnerability or distress.
      ○ **Thoughts:** "I can't tolerate these feelings," "I can't cope with this," "It's too much."
      ○ **Behaviors:** Detaching, autopilot, daydreaming
      ○ **Schemas:** Emotional inhibition*, emotional deprivation, social isolation
    ▪ **Avoidant Protector:** A form of behavioral avoidance where we will not show up to places, events, or see people that we fear may trigger our vulnerability or distress.

- o **Thoughts: "**I know I will fail, so I won't even try," "Why bother, it will go badly. I'm safer at home."
  - o **Behaviors:** Avoiding, isolating, procrastinating, giving up
  - o **Schemas:** Failure, defectiveness, abandonment, social isolation
  - ▪ **Angry Protector:** Where we use displays of aggression to drive people away.
    - o **Thoughts:** "Leave me alone," "I don't like people getting close," "Hurt or be hurt."
    - o **Behaviors:** Threats, intimidation, aggression, stonewalling
    - o **Schemas:** Mistrust/abuse, abandonment, social isolation, entitlement
  - ▪ **Complaining Protector:** Where we attribute blame to everyone else so that we don't have to take responsibility for our own actions—thus, avoiding feeling vulnerable because nothing is ever our fault.
    - o **Thoughts:** "It's not my fault," "I'm not paying for that," "I'm not getting better because of them."
    - o **Behaviors:** Complaining, blaming others, denying responsibility, making excuses
    - o **Schemas:** Dependency/Incompetence, entitlement, negativity, punitiveness
  - ▪ **Detached Self-Soother:** When feelings of vulnerability are overwhelming, we do or use something to take away the pain or feel something else.
    - o **Thoughts:** "I can't stand this feeling," "I have to get rid of it," "I need something to take the edge off."
    - o **Behaviors:** Over-eating, excessive drinking, doom-scrolling, over-spending
    - o **Schemas:** Insufficient self-control, dependency/incompetence, emotional deprivation

- ➤ **Surrender**
  - ▪ **Compliant Surrender:** A sense of giving up or giving in to our maladaptive thoughts, so we stop trying, stop fighting, and just go along with what others want.
    - o **Thoughts:** "Why even try?" "I always fail," "There is no point in fighting this."
    - o **Behaviors:** Giving up, giving in, staying quiet, subservience
    - o **Schemas:** Subjugation, defectiveness, dependency/incompetence

- ❖ **Parent Modes**
  - ➤ **Demanding Parent**: The voice in our head that is pushing us to do better, try harder, be perfect, and never fail.
    - ▪ **Thoughts**: "Try harder," "Do more," "Get it done or else…" "Don't show weakness."
    - ▪ **Behaviors**: Over-working, denying self of rest, criticizing self, ruminating on failures
    - ▪ **Schemas**: Unrelenting standards, failure, defectiveness, punitiveness

  - ➤ **Punitive Parent**: The critical voice that puts us down, berates us, and tells us we are worthless, unlovable, or a failure.
    - ▪ **Thoughts**: "You're worthless," "You're stupid," "No one likes you," "You're a failure."
    - ▪ **Behaviors**: Self-critical, self-hatred, punishing the self, ruminating on failures
    - ▪ **Schemas**: Punitiveness, failure, defectiveness, subjugation

- ❖ **Healthy Modes**
  - ➤ **Happy Child**: When our emotional needs are being met, this mode activates as the source of fun and spontaneity in our lives by making time for enjoyable activities.
    - ▪ **Thoughts**: "This is fun," "I'm enjoying this," "This is good for me."
    - ▪ **Behaviors**: Exploring, creating, allowing yourself to be silly
    - ▪ **Therapy Goals**: 1) Look for opportunities, 2) Coordinate with friends, 3) Schedule time for fun.

  - ➤ **Healthy Adult**: The stage director for all of the modes who makes skillful coping choices, shuts down the parent modes, prioritizes the child modes, and promotes self-esteem.
    - ▪ **Needs**: Connection, Growth, Play, Boundaries
    - ▪ **Thoughts**: "I am learning new ways to respond to challenging situations," "This will take time."
    - ▪ **Skills**: Soothe vulnerable child mode, listen to angry child mode, select and replace maladaptive coping modes, banish punitive parent mode, negotiate with demanding parent mode.