



Sober Buddha
—Counseling—
(949) 212-4149 | www.soberbuddha.com

NEGATIVE SCHEMAS

THE LEARNING BENEFIT:

The Negative Schemas exercise introduces you to the cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) theory that people have unconscious, habitual and cognitive distorted ways of looking at themselves, other people, their future and the world in general. When you learn to identify your own negative thinking habits, you can begin to change them for the better.

THE FACTS:

Addicted people's negative schemas automatically lean unconsciously and automatically toward the worst-case scenario. The addicted person tends to be pessimistic, and their thoughts are often so emotionally charged, that they cannot see objective reality. In fact, strong negative schemas have such a powerful hold on thinking that a person becomes unable to think anything positive. The addict makes an unconscious cognitive distortion about the total reality of a situation and sees only the negative. An alcoholic, for instance, might believe his wife is having an affair just because she spent one night at her mother's house when the older woman needed help after hip replacement surgery.

There are three basic types of negative schemas -

Depression Schemas = Thoughts and emotions about loss, deprivation and helplessness make life look empty. This person always feels that something has been taken away from them. Even when they have plenty of resources, they focus on the one person, place or thing that they do not have. Consequently, they feel life is depriving them of what they need to be happy. They believe they are helpless to change it.

Anxiety Schemas = Thoughts and emotions about worry and catastrophizing. This person constantly fears the future, imagining calamities, which most likely will never happen.

Anger Schemas = Thoughts and emotions about Insult, boundary violation, humiliation. This person feels paranoid and is hypersensitive to the comments and behaviors of others. They take constructive criticism as personal attack and feel that others are invading their space. Their self-esteem is low and they are easily humiliated by even the slightest disappointment. Their automatic reaction is to strike back.

Negative Compensation

Addicted people numb out to cope with the painful impact of negative schemas. They avoid the hard work of correcting their thinking and behavior, so never develop psychological or emotional strength. For example, if your negative schema is that you are incompetent, you will take only menial jobs in which you cannot fail. This retards your growth because taking the menial job prevents you from trying to improve. Some people compensate for negative schemas by lowering their interpersonal relationship standards. Assume your negative schema belief is that someone you love will always abandon you. You get into relationships with people even needier than yourself, who cling to you desperately. You end up in a codependent relationship that prevents you from learning to deal constructively with the realities of loneliness and the challenge of learning to function in a mutually supportive relationship.

THE WRITING EXERCISE:

Write your most depressing negative schema for each category, then answer the questions that follow.

Depression Schemas - Loss, deprivation, helplessness.

Example: *"I never get what I really want and there's nothing I can do about it."*

What do I do to perpetuate this schema or to compensate for it?

What's the objective truth of my situation? Is there any absolute evidence that how I have thought and acted in the past has to continue into my future? How can I think and act differently to overcome my negativity?

Anxiety Schemas - Worry, catastrophizing.

Example: *"I know something's going to go wrong at work, I can just feel it."*

What do I do to perpetuate this schema or to compensate for it?

What's the objective truth of my situation? Is there any absolute evidence that how I have thought and acted in the past has to continue into my future? How can I think and act differently to overcome my negativity?

Anger Schemas - Insults, boundary violations, humiliation

Example: *"People are always telling me what to do, like I'm too stupid, and I'd like to just punch them in the nose!"*

What do I do to perpetuate this schema or to compensate for it?

What's the objective truth of my situation? Is there any absolute evidence that how I have thought and acted in the past has to continue into my future? How can I think and act differently to overcome my negativity?

REMEMBER: Negative schemas are caused by four things:

1. Childhood wounds
2. Cognitive damage caused by substance abuse
3. Organic illness
4. Inappropriate behavior and resulting trauma

The problems are caused when your thinking and actions are automatically run by negative schemas, but can be changed with abstinence, therapy and healthy living.

The past does not have to dictate your future!