



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

POSITIVE SCHEMAS

THE LEARNING BENEFIT:

The Positive Schemas exercise introduces you to the flip side of its sister set of Negative Schemas. By learning to replace Negative Schemas with Positive Schemas addicts can radically improve their attitude toward themselves and the world around them.

THE FACTS:

Most addicts' thinking is more negative than positive, which is why they seek relief through substance intoxication. Being high temporarily masks the negative messages of depression and anxiety, but they only come back stronger. Addicts must work diligently to replace negative schemas with positive views of themselves and their world. Positive Schemas create optimistic ways of approaching people and situations, and eventually eliminate the addict's tendencies to self-sabotage.

Positive Schemas produce the energetically charged thoughts and emotions that accompany a confident approach to life. Positive Schemas help you look at reality objectively and search for ways to deal with, rather than retreat from challenges. An addict learning to adopt Positive Schemas makes a conscious effort to put aside old ways of thinking. A recovering alcoholic, for instance, who had suffered a relapse, would be open and honest about what led up to his slip and work hard not to repeat the mistake. He would not beat himself up about it, as Negative Schema thinking would lead him to do.

Three primary Positive Schemas –

Optimism Schemas = Ability to see the positive side of events and to work toward favorable outcomes. This person always sees opportunity in tough situations and approaches life assertively.

Compassion Schemas = Feelings of empathy and desire to help someone else who is suffering. The compassionate person is strong enough to support others in need.

Capability Schemas = Capability is the product of optimism and compassion. You believe you have the talent, ability and flexibility to reach your own highest potential. You also work to inspire this in others.

You can bring positive schemas to life by approaching, rather than avoiding challenging situations. For example, if you work the capability schema, you will take the most challenging job you can find. In an optimism schema scenario, you might not be accepted by the college of your choice, but you eagerly look forward to getting the most out of the college you do attend. A compassionate schema allows you to forgive yourself and others with understanding and to provide active support when addiction relapse occurs, without resorting to unproductive criticism or emotionality.

THE WRITING EXERCISE:

Imagine and write down the most positive schema for each category, then answer the questions that follow.

1. Optimism Schema – Opportunity, assertiveness, favorable events.

Example: *"I sure did want that job in Los Angeles, but I'm looking forward to settling down in San Francisco instead."*

What old negative belief about myself and life in general do I have to give up to start thinking positively?

What is the advantage of looking at the situation this way?

What is likely to happen if I do not take an optimistic view of the situation? What effect will that have on my quality of life?

2. Compassion Schema – Forgiveness, understanding, support.

Example: *"John's relapse must be as devastating to him as mine was to me. I've got to see him through this."*

How might I have looked at this situation if I was still stuck in my old negative way of thinking?

What is the advantage of looking at the situation this way?

What is likely to happen if I become more compassionate toward the suffering of others? What effect will that have on my quality of life?

3. Capability Schema - Talent, ability, flexibility, potential.

Example: *"Why is everybody so afraid to take on that new project? I can handle it."*

How might I have looked at this situation if I was still stuck in my old negative way of thinking?

What is the advantage of looking at the situation this way?

What is likely to happen if I believe I more capable of handling the challenges in my life that I used to shy away from? What effect will that have on my quality of life?

REMEMBER: Positive schemas improve the quality of your life four ways:

Your optimistic attitude makes you happier in a daily basis.

Your compassion improves the quality of your personal relationships.

Believing that you are capable creates new personal and professional opportunities.

Optimistic, compassionate and capable people don't need drugs and alcohol to cope with life.