Breaking Negative Thinking Patterns

A Schema Therapy Self-help and Support Book
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Are you familiar with the experience of negative thinking patterns keeping you from attaining your personal goals? With this book we want to help you understand yourself, your feelings, and your personal patterns better. Your negative thinking patterns are the “beaten track” which you have walked many times. If you want to find new ways, you should understand the origins of your beaten track and why you take it again and again. The first part of this book is all about understanding negative thinking patterns, and the related emotions and behaviors. In the second part we will explain in detail how you can change these patterns, if you consider a change necessary or reasonable.

We base our explanations on the so-called Schema Mode approach. This is the latest development in Schema Therapy, which was developed by Jeffery Young and colleagues in New York (2006) and is rapidly spreading around the globe. Many therapists are enthusiastic about schema therapy, as it integrates experiences and techniques from various therapeutic approaches very effectively. Not only thoughts but also feelings are taken into consideration, and current problems are of interest as well as their origin in childhood. This usually gives clients the impression of work being done on the “core” of their problems in an easy and understandable way. In work with schema modes, clients and therapists are at eye-level. Both parties are looking for better ways to meet clients’ needs.

In this book we try to go through the Schema Mode approach in an understandable way for anyone who is interested. We want
to encourage you to change your patterns in such a way that negative feelings will weaken and positive feelings get more space in your life. To attain this goal, you will need to reduce disadvantageous coping strategies for negative feelings. You can use this book either as a self-help book or as assistance to a (Schema-) therapy. Psychological technical terms which may not be familiar to you are printed in **bold** and explained in the Glossary. You can download and print all worksheets from the book’s website (www.wiley.com/go/Jacob/breakingnegativethoughtpatterns). More detailed instructions are provided at the end of the book.

This book project is part of a long-standing cooperation and exchange program of the University of Freiburg (Germany), the Regionale Instelling voor Ambulante Geestelijke Gezondheidszorg (RIAGG) in Maastricht and the University of Maastricht (Netherlands). This cooperation, which offered us many interesting insights and common projects, has been a pleasure throughout its duration. We thank Darren Reed and his colleagues from Wiley Blackwell for their effective and committed support. Claudia Styrsky drew the wonderful cartoons in this book – we could not get enough of them! Last but not least we say thanks to our husbands and families for being so tolerant (again) to help us devote so many week-ends and so much precious free time to this project!

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*Gitta Jacob, Hannie van Genderen, Laura Seebauer*
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Illustrations are by Claudia Styrsy, München.
Introduction

Case Example “Exclusion”

Carol is a 34-year-old mother of a 4-year-old son, in a stable relationship. She works part-time as a bank assistant. She could be quite satisfied with her life, but minor incidents sometimes trigger severe feelings of exclusion or rejection. This may happen, for example, when her colleagues who work full-time make an “insider joke” she doesn’t get. Most often, she reacts by drawing back from them. But she may also respond like a stroppy child to her colleagues, in particular when she is having a bad day anyway. Then she is not only annoyed by her colleagues, but also feels ashamed of her own reaction.

Carol has had this kind of problem all her life… maybe it has something to do with her childhood. Because of her father’s frequent job changes, she was forced to move and start all over again several times. Facing a new school class, she often made the experience of feeling excluded. At the age of 12, she even experienced severe mobbing in school.

Does that sound familiar to you? Persistent patterns you just cannot get rid of? The same kind of feelings mixing up your life over and over again?
If you want to change your patterns, you should first understand and recognize which patterns are bothering you right now in your daily life. Find out how these patterns developed over your life and why they are so persistent. In the first part of this book we explain how you can explore the origins of your patterns. You will also discover your real needs and how you can meet them better.

In Part II we will introduce methods to change your patterns step by step and in the way that you want. You can either deal with this by yourself, using the advice in this book, or, if and when this seems too difficult, you might consider seeking help from a therapist.

The therapy that’s aiming to change your patterns is called schema therapy. The central concept in schema therapy is called “schema mode” or simply “Mode.” A Mode is a persistent pattern of behaving and feeling that always causes the same type of problems. In fact, it is a state of mind that is connected to bad experiences in your youth or childhood.

In this book we will explain the schema Modes we know about and the ways that you can change them. You can use this book both as a self-help guide and as a support during a schema therapy. If you decide to change your Modes by yourself we recommend that you get someone you trust to discuss your patterns with you. We also recommend that you read this book step by step. Think about each chapter you read before going ahead. In this way you will learn to deal better with difficult situations, your negative feelings will diminish and you will fulfill your needs in a healthier way.

1.1 What Is Schema Therapy?

Schema therapy is one of the latest advances in psychotherapy. It is a development of cognitive behavior therapy, combining ideas from various psychotherapeutic approaches. Box 1.1 lists psychotherapy approaches that have been influential on schema therapy.
1.1 What Is Schema Therapy?

Box 1.1: Approaches That Have Influenced Schema Therapy

*Cognitive behavioral therapy*: Focusing on changes in thoughts and behavior in concrete, current life problems.

*Depth psychology*: Most psychological problems have their origin in experiences in childhood and youth.

*Psychodrama and Gestalt therapy*: Techniques to change problematic emotions.

*Humanistic therapy/Client-centered therapy*: Focusing on human needs and on their importance for mental health.

Emotions play the most important role in schema therapy. Both positive and negative childhood experiences form our adult emotional reactions. Imagine that you have been humiliated as a child, because your clothes were different or your nose was extraordinarily big. If you often felt rejected and humiliated as a child, it’s very likely that you will easily feel rejected or humiliated as an adult, too – even if nobody means to make you suffer this way. Such feelings typically lead to many problems: for instance, you might not make contact with others easily and thus not be able to establish healthy and close relationships; or you might react aggressively to prevent further humiliation, even if your action is not at all appropriate.

Therefore, the very first step of schema therapy is always to understand your negative feelings and their origin in your biography. Then, all current negative consequences of these feelings and childhood experiences are explored. The second step is to support you in changing your feelings and your dysfunctional behaviors. Thus, you will more satisfied and better able to fulfill your needs in a healthy and appropriate way.