

Everyone has a basic need for things like safety, acceptance, freedom, and reasonable limits. If these core needs aren't met during childhood, people develop schemas. Schemas are negative themes or patterns that define your life, shaping how you see and respond to experiences in unhelpful ways.

People with an emotional inhibition schema find it difficult to express their emotions, fearing that it will lead to criticism, embarrassment, or losing control. As a result, they might struggle with being vulnerable, affectionate, playful, or spontaneous.



Emotional inhibition is associated with a variety of difficulties:

- Addictions
- Bipolar disorder
- Body image problems
- Burnout
- Depression
- Eating disorders
- OCD
- Personality disorders
- Relationship problems
- Self-harm
- Social anxiety
- Suicidal thoughts
- Trauma



Recognizing your emotional inhibition schema

Schemas have different components. They can also be active or inactive. Triggers for emotional inhibition include situations where you are vulnerable, intimate, or need to express yourself. Signs this schema is active include:

Thinking:

- "It's weak to be emotional / vulnerable."
- "I can't cope with my feelings."
- "Being emotional about this is pointless/unhelpful."



Feeling:

- Ashamed of your emotional reactions.
- Anxious about losing control.
- Unsure of what you feel.



Focusing on:

- Controlling yourself.
- Being rational or emotionally detached.
- How other people might judge your reactions.



Remembering:

- Being criticized for expressing yourself.
- Family members who were cold, restrained, or unemotional.
- Having to hide or suppress your true feelings.



Coping with your emotional inhibition schema

Schemas can be painful. People learn to cope with emotional inhibition in different ways: by accepting it ('surrender'), avoiding it ('escape'), or acting like the opposite is true ('counter-attacking'). However, these coping styles tend to strengthen schemas over time.

You might surrender to this schema by:

- Being detached and unemotional.
- Not doing anything spontaneous or impulsive.
- Prioritizing logic / rationality over your feelings.



You might escape this schema by:

- Avoiding talking about your feelings.
- Burying your emotions (e.g., by drinking alcohol).
- Avoiding expressive activities like dancing.



You might counter-attack this schema by:

- Being very expressive or sharing too much.
- Forcing yourself to be lively and outgoing.
- Acting in a disinhibited or impulsive way.



You might cope in other ways, such as:

- Pretending to be tired or unwell so you don't have to express yourself.
- Making fun of serious feelings or topics.



Healing your emotional inhibition schema

People develop an emotional inhibition schema when their need for emotional expression, openness, and spontaneity have not been met. For example, your parents might have criticized, humiliated, or disapproved of you for being expressive or emotional. Perhaps they were emotionally inhibited themselves. Some cultures and communities emphasize the importance of not showing feelings or vulnerabilities too.

Meeting your need for self-expression, playfulness, and spontaneity will help you heal this schema. This might involve learning to recognize and value your emotions, experimenting with showing your feelings, connecting with others emotionally, and doing things that are fun and unplanned. Encouraging the people around you to express themselves might be important too.