

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 deprivation schema feel they don't get the care, support, or understanding they need from others. This leaves them feeling lonely, unimportant, and empty – like something important is missing. Some people with this schema are unaware of their emotional needs, while others don't express them because they think it will end in disappointment.



Emotional deprivation is associated with a variety of difficulties:

- Addictions
- Anger
- Burnout
- Chronic pain
- Depression
- Eating disorders
- Personality disorder
- Psychosis
- Relationship problems
- Trauma
- Self-harm
- Social anxiety
- Suicidal thoughts



Recognizing your emotional deprivation schema

Schemas have different components. They can also be active or inactive. People tend to experience emotional deprivation in their close relationships (or lack of them). Signs that this schema is active include:

Thinking:

- "People don't care about me."
- "My emotional needs aren't right/important."
- "Other people should know what I need."



Feeling:

- Lonely, isolated, or uncared for.
- Angry that other people are depriving you.
- Desperately needy or clingy.



Focusing on:

- Signs you are being neglected or misunderstood.
- Other people's needs and not your own.
- The sense your needs are wrong or unnatural.



Remembering:

- Feeling lonely and unsupported as a child.
- Others being cold, disinterested, or unaffectionate.
- Being given things instead of being loved.



Coping with your emotional deprivation schema

Schemas can be painful. People learn to cope with emotional deprivation 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:

- Not expressing your emotional needs.
- Acting as if you don't have emotional needs.
- Choosing uncaring friends or partners.



You might escape this schema by:

- Avoiding intimate relationships.
- Ending relationships before they get too close.
- Withdrawing at the first sign of being neglected.



You might counter-attack this schema by:

- Demanding other people meet your needs.
- Punishing people who don't meet your needs.
- Neglecting or ignoring other people's needs.



You might cope in other ways:

- Pretending to be sick to get care or attention.
- Trying to be funny to gain affection.
- Accepting care but not giving it back.



Healing your emotional deprivation schema

People develop an emotional deprivation schema when they don't get the emotional care they need as children. For example, your parents might have struggled to be affectionate, comforting, or attentive. Perhaps no-one understood or guided you. Alternatively, you might have been valued for superficial things like your looks or achievements, or spoiled with possessions, rather than being loved and accepted unconditionally. Sometimes the origins of this schema are subtle – you just felt lonely and neglected somehow.

Caring for your emotional needs will help you heal this schema. This involves learning to notice, accept, and express your needs, and developing nurturing relationships where they are likely to be met. If your response to feeling deprived is extreme, you may need to find healthy ways to manage these reactions. Crucially, caring for your needs will also mean caring for the lonely child inside you.