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Schema Therapy : A Quick Guide



What the fact sheet covers:

- What is Schema Therapy?
- How does Schema Therapy work?
- Who can Schema Therapy help?
- How long does Schema Therapy take?
- What will I need to do in Schema Therapy sessions?

What is Schema Therapy?

Schema Therapy is an evidence-based approach designed to help people identify and change deep, long-standing patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving (known as schemas). These schemas typically form owing to challenging experiences in early life and can continue into adulthood affecting a person's relationships, self-esteem and emotional well-being.

Developed by Dr Jeffery Young (psychologist) in the 1990s, Schema Therapy can help emergency service workers address underlying emotional themes and unhelpful beliefs and behaviours, that are activated by the demands and experiences associated with their job.

How does Schema Therapy work?

Schema Therapy typically involves:

- **Identifying your core schemas** and coping modes by completing questionnaires and discussing your life history
- **Connecting schemas to past experiences** which typically involve unmet emotional needs
- **Using experiential techniques** such as imagery rescripting and chair work to access emotional states
- **Reworking maladaptive beliefs** and behaviours through cognitive and behavioural strategies
- **Strengthening the healthy adult mode**, which can nurture, set boundaries, and meet emotional needs more effectively

For first responders, therapy may focus on more prominent patterns like emotional numbing, overcompensating, detachment, or persistent guilt and self-criticism.



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Who can Schema Therapy help?

Schema Therapy can be helpful for first responders who:

- Experience chronic anxiety, depression, or burnout
- Feel “stuck” in the same patterns over time
- Struggle with long-term emotional difficulties, low self-worth, or interpersonal conflict
- Have traits associated with certain personality disorders
- Grew up with significant emotional neglect or inconsistency and now find this reflected in work stress or relationships

How long does it take?

Schema therapy is typically considered a long-term treatment as it addresses deep rooted issues. This type of therapy can be completed in **10 to 20 sessions**. This may increase in number depending on the complexity of your presentation.

What will I need to do in Schema Therapy sessions?

Engaging in Schema Therapy treatment requires a few key commitments:

- **Attend therapy sessions regularly**, typically weekly to fortnightly
- **Be willing to talk** about childhood experiences
- **Openly engage** with selected bilateral stimulation and honestly share your experience
- **Complete outcome measures** at the beginning, middle, and end of therapy to support progress tracking and treatment planning



How can I get support at Black Dog Institute?

The [National Emergency Worker Support Service](#) provides up to 12 free therapy sessions to emergency service workers and volunteers needing support.

This service is available for individuals, over the age of 18 years, associated with services nationwide, including Police, SES, Fire Services, Ambulance, and more. No GP referral required. To book online [click here](#) or call our clinic on **(02) 9843 9450**.

References:

- Australian Psychological Society. (2024). *Evidence-based psychological interventions in the treatment of mental disorders: A literature review* (5th ed.).
- Jacob, G. A., Arntz, A., & van Genderen, H. (2015). Schema therapy for personality disorders: A review and meta-analysis. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 34(7), 512–525. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2014.01.003>
- Wilson, S. A.-M., Tinker, R. H., Becker, L. A., & Logan, C. R. (2001). The effectiveness of schema therapy for patients with anxiety disorders obsessive-compulsive disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder: A systematic review. *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 40(3), 179–200.

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