

Introduction to The Schema of Abandonment

When the schema of Abandonment is activated in our system, we are left sitting in an emotional space that's filled with fear. It's often a constant sense of anxiety about the instability of our intimate connections with the people who hold the most meaning in our lives. Whether this fear is real, and therefore justified, or if it's a completely subjective point of view that has been heightened as a result of the psychological filters attached to this particular schema is completely irrelevant. It leaves us with the rigid belief that people who are important in our lives will no longer continue to be there for you because they are either, emotionally unpredictable, they are only present erratically, they will die, or they will leave us for someone better.

This schema is usually derived from a perception of instability in the early childhood environment, that leads to a number of different unmet childhood needs. These emotionally activating situations happen often enough to create the belief that people won't be there for you when you need them the most. However, at the same time, it's worth pointing out that this schema may also arise as a result of growing up in a proverbial "bubble of protection," where things are constantly done for us. This leaves us dependent on others to get things done and leads to the development of a significant amount of fear for what will happen if the protection is no longer there.

“My relationships were always impaired by my anxious fearful attachment as a result of my constant fear of abandonment.”

~ Steven Morris RP

The schema of abandonment for me, was one that revolved around a fundamental belief that I will lose anyone I get close to, and therefore, be left emotionally isolated forever. When this story was active in my system it felt like I had a constant sense of despair around relationships that were important to me. While it was prominent in my intimate partnerships, it was also something that I experienced in group activities, at work, and in what were perceived as casual relationships too.

As I previously mentioned, there are generally 2 distinct types of story that are associated with a schema of Abandonment. They usually manifest as a result of 2 different types of childhood experiences. The first type comes from an environment that is emotionally unstable and unpredictable for the developing child trying to make sense of their place in the world. If this was the environment you grew up in, it can leave you with thoughts and feelings that people aren't there for you with any degree of consistency.

The second type, which often gets overlooked, comes from an environment that is experienced as being too secure and overprotected. Everything is done to make sure we don't suffer or struggle in any way and there is always someone there to pick up the pieces from our mistakes. If this was the environment you grew up in as a child, your current adult behaviour patterns will be connected to a combination of the schemas of Abandonment and Dependency.

For me, it was a light bulb moment to realize why my story was the way that it was. It allowed me to develop my awareness for the reasons why I had so much anxiety around developing relationships that were close, emotionally intimate, and connected at a deeper level. Working with this story, or combination of stories, is really effective way to improve our attachment style. and it is incredibly beneficial in developing our ability to Live the Life we Want to Live.

Next, let's check in to see how you relate to this schema. Answer the questions below based on your personal experiences and the rating scale provided.

Never 0	Sometimes 1	50/50 2	Often 3	Always 4
Description				Score
I worry a lot that the people I love will find someone else they prefer, someone who is better than me, and they will leave me.				
I often find myself clinging to people I'm close to because I'm afraid that sooner or later they are bound to leave me and move on to something else.				

Based on the scores you gave for the questions above, and the way you relate to the description provided on the previous pages, how Relevant is the schema of Abandonment to you in your life? Add the two scores together to calculate your prevalence score. On a scale of 0 – 8, 0 being not present at all, and 8 being present in my life every day, rate your experience of the schema of Abandonment.

My Schema of Abandonment and Instability has a prevalence score of ___/8.

On the next page, take the time to explore your experience of the Schema of Abandonment and Instability, see if you can identify how you feel when this schema is active, how you are thinking when this schema is active, what you do when this schema is active, and what situations you might need to be aware of that can activate this way of thinking in your personality system.

- a. How does the schema of Abandonment impact your life when it is present in your system, what are the stories that show up for you, how do you know that it's present in your thoughts and feelings?

- b. How do you currently cope with this schema when it is activated in your system, in other words, what do you do when you feel this way, how do you normally behave?

- c. What are some new things you can do to cope with this schema when you are aware of its presence in your system, what would help you process the story in a healthy way? (Try to think in terms of the skill we learn in DBT)

- d. What would be a more balanced way of seeing the world when this schema is activated in your system, what would you say to someone you knew who was dealing with this type of story?
