

## **The Schema of Mistrust**

When the schema of Mistrust is activated in our system, we become burdened with the belief that all relationships are painful experiences, because we simply can't trust the other person, or we can't trust your own judgement about the other person. Relationships, whether friendships or intimate partnerships, become places where we just can't relax or become emotionally vulnerable in any way. Instead, they are a representation of dangerous and unpredictable experiences that activate a level of fear in our system that's overwhelming to deal with. When in this particular state of mind, we become rigidly attached to the belief that people will hurt us, betray us, and use us, and as a result, we have to stay on guard at all times. It becomes extremely hard for us to trust people, even the ones we are closest too. In fact, it may be particularly the ones we are closest too that we are most unable to trust.

In many cases, this schema will activate an automatic assumption that people secretly mean us harm. If this is the case, when someone does something nice for us, our mind searches for the ulterior motive, and we generally expect people to lie to us and to try to take advantage of us in some way. At the same time, dialectically speaking, there may be a story that's attached to the schema of mistrust around our own decision making. As a result, we search around, from person to person, trying to find the answer that gives us the concrete solution to the problem we are faced with, but never actually choosing to take any action ourselves. This schema is strongly linked to unmet childhood needs of autonomy, and it is usually created as a result of childhood choices being suppressed or denied in the family of origin.

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**“I usually had a hard time accepting compliments from others, as I was always looking for the ulterior motive, lacking trust in the persons intent.”**

**~ Steven Morris RP**

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The schema of mistrust for me, was connected to a story of manipulation. In my past, I was looking for the hidden meaning behind the reason people did things. I found it hard to accept that someone had genuine intentions behind their actions, and it regularly left me sitting in a system filled with fear and anxiety. In relationships, I struggled to relax and lacked the ability to express myself with any level of vulnerability. This was extremely problematic for me personally, as my vulnerable child was lonely, and the burden of loneliness is lifted by making connection, which can't be made without some degree of vulnerability.

I was constantly on my guard, never allowing myself to be truly seen, hiding my insecurities behind humour. This was always the way it went until I felt that it was safe to lower my guard. At which point, my anxious fearful attachment would kick in, and I would flood the other person with my thoughts and feelings. This usually pushed them away, confirming my belief that I “Shouldn’t” have trusted them in the first place, solidifying the schema as a fact in my mind, and definitely not a fabricated story.

Mistrust can often, but not always, be as a result of abuse. Which, for obvious reasons, brings about a part of our personality that sits in hypervigilance. If this is you, then you are constantly on your guard, and you spend your time assuming that other people mean you harm. This belief may be directed at the whole world, or just one particular group of people, depending on your experiences and the filters you have acquired along the way.

It is also worth remembering that the schema of mistrust may not always be directed to the outside world. It is extremely common for people stepping into making changes, trying to live the life they want to live, to harbour feelings of mistrust for Self. Constantly second guessing the decisions they make, confused about the direction they should take, seeking the guidance from others for confirmation. If this is you, the schema of mistrust may be coupled with a story of dependence. Either way, it is common that we are left with parts of our personality that have a deep sense of despair, anxiety and depression are an ever-present experience, as we find ourselves actively struggling against a state of fight or flight.

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<br>0  | Sometimes<br>1 | 50/50<br>2 | Often<br>3 | Always<br>4 |
|---|----------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| Description   |                |            |            | Score       |
| I am usually on the lookout for people's desire to manipulate me, so I can see their ulterior motives; I generally don't trust people easily. |                |            |            |             |
| I often feel like I cannot let my guard down around other people, or they will hurt me, take advantage of me, or do something bad.            |                |            |            |             |

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 Mistrust and Abuse 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, rate your experience of the schema of Mistrust and Abuse.

My Schema of Mistrust and Abuse has a prevalence score of \_\_\_/8.

On the next page, take the time to explore your experience of the Schema of Mistrust and Abuse, 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 Mistrust impact your life when it's 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?

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- 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?

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- 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)

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- 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?

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