DEFECTIVENESS & SHAME SCHEMA (DS) FORMULATION & TREATMENT GUIDE

DEFINITION & TREATMENT AIMS

Clients typically

See themselves as:

- Defective, flawed, inferior and "not good enough"
- Unlovable/broken
- Overly responsible for their problems

DS vs the Failure schema (FA)

- DS: core sense of defectiveness/worthlessness
- FA: lacking achievement/success in important areas relative to peers

Treatment aims to heal this schema

- Increase self-esteem & self-acceptance/worth
- See themselves as worthy of love despite being imperfect
- Reduce avoidance due to fear of exposure

CLIENT PRESENTATION & UPBRINGING

Clients may present as

- Comparing self to others and chronic shame
- Jealous/competitive & sensitive to criticism
- Secretive due to shame about having flaws exposed and being judged
- Having partners who are critical & rejecting

If clients have this schema, look out for

- Unrelenting Standards, Entitlement & Failure
- Narcissistic traits
- Avoidant modes to avoid feelings of shame
- Perfectionistic over-controller

Upbringing

- Critical or rejecting parents
- Parents devalued or humiliated them
- Parents may have compared them to others

TREATMENT STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE SCHEMA HEALING

Chairwork

- Ask the client to speak from the DS schema (chair 1) (i.e., I'm no good). Next, ask them to respond from the perspective of a loved or admired person (chair 2), which accesses the healthy adult mode (HAM) of others to build their own HAM. Write down these healing messages adding your own. Give them to the client to review for homework
- Express anger to parents/adults in childhood who contributed to feeling defective, this may uncover core unmet needs to be met from HAM
- If a critic mode is detected in the room, place it on an empty chair and conduct empathic confrontation with the critic noting the impact on the vulnerable child mode (VCM)

Imagery (relevant child mode: rejected child)

- Rescript memories where the client felt defective. Confront parents/others who contributed to the schema and soothe/meet needs for the rejected child. Over time the aim is for the client's HAM to soothe the VCM
- Variant: ask the client to imagine the people they love surrounding them, what reassuring words would they say/want the client to know?
  - Next, ask the client's permission to enter the image & offer reparenting messages

Reparenting/healthy adult messages in imagery

- You are worthy just for being you
- None of us are perfect, but you are enough
- You matter just as you are, independent of achievements

Limited reparenting throughout therapy

- Acknowledge client flaws but always be caring and non-judgemental
- Be genuine about own fallibility, disclosing appropriate mistakes to the client & model HAM response (i.e., mistakes are not a reflection of my worth, but they are an opportunity to learn)
- Provide voice recordings with reassuring messages for them to listen to when the schema is activated

Cognitive

- Compare evidence for and against the schema
- Jointly create a list of strengths & add to them
- Challenge distorted cognitions related to receiving feedback

Behavioural

- Address genuine flaws (e.g., poor spelling)
- Practise embracing schema healing relationships
- Set limits on those who genuinely reject them

SYNTHESIZED, ADAPTED AND EXPANDED FROM THE FOLLOWING SOURCES AND MY OWN CLINICAL EXPERIENCE
Roediger, E., Stevens, B., & Brockman, R. (2018). Contextual schema therapy. Oakland, CA: Context Press.
Young, J.E., Klosko, J.S. & Weishaar, M.E. (2003). Schema Therapy: A Practitioner's Guide: New York: Guilford Press.