



Brief Early Schema Questionnaire (BESQ)

Description

The Brief Early Schema Questionnaire (BESQ) is a 24-item self-report instrument designed to identify early maladaptive schemas as conceptualised within the framework of Schema Therapy (Young et al., 2006; Brockman et al 2023).

Developed by Brockman, Hayes, and Behary (2023), the BESQ is a condensed alternative to longer schema questionnaires such as the Young Schema Questionnaire (YSQ) and can be helpful in therapy to build shared understanding and begin inquiry into problematic cognitive and emotional patterns.

The BESQ groups schemas into the schema therapy model's five domains, with each domain corresponding to groups of unmet emotional needs during childhood and adolescence (Young et al., 2006). Furthermore, several schemas are split into sub-domains, for example, Punitiveness is split into (a) Self, and (b) Others.

1. Disconnection and Rejection Domain - Expectations of instability in relationships. Related to the unmet need for safe attachment, acceptance and care.

Includes schemas of:

- Abandonment/Instability
- Mistrust/Abuse
- Emotional Deprivation (x3 sub-domains)
- Defectiveness/Shame
- Social Isolation/Alienation

2. Impaired Autonomy and Performance Domain - Feelings of helplessness, vulnerability and overreliance on others. Related to the unmet need for autonomy, competence and sense of identity.

Includes schemas of:

- Dependence/Incompetence



- Vulnerability to Harm or Illness
- Enmeshment/Underdeveloped Self (x2 sub-domains)
- Failure

3. Impaired Limits Domain - A lack of clear boundaries and structured limitations. Related to the unmet need for realistic limits and self-control.

- Includes schemas of:
- Entitlement/Grandiosity
- Insufficient Self-Control (x2 sub-domains)

4. Other-Directedness Domain - Excessive attention to others' needs, driven by fears of disapproval and a strong need for acceptance, often at the expense of one's own well-being. Related to the unmet need for free expression of needs and emotions

Includes schemas of:

- Subjugation
- Self-Sacrifice
- Approval/Recognition Seeking

5. Over Vigilance and Inhibition Domain – An over-emphasis on potential negative outcomes, avoiding mistakes and strict self-control. Related to the unmet need for spontaneity and play.

Includes schemas of:

- Negativity/Pessimism
- Emotional Inhibition (x2 sub-domains)
- Unrelenting Standards
- Punitiveness (x2 sub-domains)

Schemas have been shown to have important associations with many mental health diagnoses, including PTSD, borderline personality disorder, dissociative disorders, depression, and anxiety (Bär et al., 2023). Assessment of schemas have typically been assessed with lengthier assessment scales, which can be time-consuming to administer. The brief nature of the BESQ makes it a valuable tool for initial assessment, assisting in



formulation and identification of treatment targets.

The BESQ can be used in clinical settings to identify potential areas of focus for therapy, particularly in approaches that emphasise early experiences and their impact on current functioning.

Validity

Given the recent release of the BESQ, its psychometric properties have not yet been established. However, the scale was developed on the theoretical framework and principles of Schema Therapy (Brockman et al 2023; Young et al., 2006). This framework includes core concepts such as early maladaptive schemas, coping styles, and schema modes. The scale draws directly from this model, and its items are closely aligned with its central constructs.

Interpretation

BESQ scores are presented for each individual schema, with responses on a 6-point Likert scale describing how relatable an item is:

1 (Completely unrelated to me) to 6 (Relates to me perfectly)

Higher scores indicate a greater identification with a schema and suggest that it may be relevant to the individual's cognitive and emotional patterns.

Scores are presented for each schema as well as the domains.

- Scores of 1-2: Low Range - seems unrelated to the individual's experience.
- Scores of 3-4: Mid-Range - may be somewhat related to the individual's experience.
- Scores of 5-6: High Range - may be very much related to the individual's experience.

Scores are also presented for the domain on unmet need. Unmet needs refer to a fundamental emotional need that was not adequately fulfilled during childhood or early development. These unmet needs are considered crucial for healthy psychological development and well-being. When these needs are not met, individuals may develop maladaptive schemas.



The unmet need and associated schemas are as follows:

-- Disconnection and Rejection Domain --

- Abandonment/Instability
- Mistrust/Abuse
- Emotional Deprivation: Nurturance
- Emotional Deprivation: Empathy
- Emotional Deprivation: Protection
- Defectiveness/Shame
- Social Isolation/Alienation

-- Impaired Autonomy and Performance Domain --

- Dependence/Incompetence
- Vulnerability to Harm or Illness
- Enmeshment
- Enmeshment: Underdeveloped Self
- Failure

-- Impaired Limits Domain --

- Entitlement/Grandiosity
- Insufficient Self-Control
- Insufficient Self-Discipline

-- Other-Directedness --

- Subjugation
- Self-Sacrifice
- Approval/Recognition Seeking

-- Over Vigilance and Inhibition --

- Negativity/Pessimism
- Emotional Inhibition - Constriction
- Emotional Inhibition - Fear of Losing Control
- Unrelenting Standards
- Punitiveness Self
- Punitiveness Others



Developer

Brockman, R., Hayes, C., & Behary, W. (2023). Brief Early Schema Questionnaire (BESQ).

References

Bär, A., Bär, H. E., Rijkeboer, M. M., & Lobbestael, J. (2023). Early Maladaptive Schemas and Schema Modes in clinical disorders: A systematic review. *Psychology and Psychotherapy*, 96(3), 716-747. <https://doi.org/10.1111/papt.12465>

Brockman, R. N., Simpson, S., Hayes, C., van der Wijngaart, R., & Smout, M. (2023). *Cambridge guide to Schema therapy*. Cambridge University Press.

Brockman, R., Hayes, C., & Behary, W. (2023). Brief Early Schema Questionnaire (BESQ).

Young, J. E., Klosko, J. S., & Weishaar, M. E. (2006). *Schema therapy: A practitioner's guide*. Guilford Press.

Instructions to Client

Listed below are definitions of the proposed schema domains and corresponding Early Maladaptive Schemas.

Please read each definition and decide how well it describes you. When you are not sure, base your answer on what you emotionally feel, NOT on what you think to be true.