Modes: the different parts of me

Why you can feel like a different person from one hour to the next.

We all have different sides that take over at different times. Schema therapy calls these modes. Knowing which one is in charge helps you understand your reactions and choose what to do.

The vulnerable child

The part that holds the old hurt: lonely, frightened, ashamed, unloved. Triggered when a need is not met.

The angry or impulsive child

The part that rages at unfairness, or acts on impulse to get a need met right now.

The critic

An internalised voice, often from a parent, teacher or peers. It attacks ("you are pathetic") or demands ("not good enough, try harder").

The detached protector

Shuts feelings off. Numb, flat, busy, distracted. "I am fine."

The pleaser

Gives in and goes along to avoid conflict or rejection.

The overcontroller or fighter

Takes charge, attacks, or strives for perfection to stay safe.

The happy child

Playful, curious, spontaneous, connected. Present when needs are met.

The healthy adult

Sees clearly, soothes the vulnerable child, sets limits on the critic and the impulsive side, and takes sensible action.

How modes work together

A trigger touches the vulnerable child. Often, before you even feel that hurt, the critic attacks or a coping mode jumps in to shut it down. From outside, people see the anger, the withdrawal or the people pleasing. They do not see the hurt underneath.

The aim of therapy

1. To recognise each mode when it shows up.
2. To care for the vulnerable child and get its needs met.
3. To stand up to the critic.
4. To thank the coping modes and need them less.
5. To strengthen the healthy adult, so it is in charge more of the time.

The modes I recognise most in myself

When is my healthy adult strongest?

The mode model comes from schema therapy, developed by Jeffrey Young.

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