

Rx: Remedies for Lifetraps (*Schemas*)

ABANDONMENT / INSTABILITY

- therapy relationship is a source of healing and transfer this learning to significant others
- accept the therapist's departures and unavailability without over-reacting
- find someone to replace the therapist as the primary relationship i.e., someone else who is also stable
- alter exaggerated view that other people will eventually leave, die or behave unpredictably
- learn to stop catastrophising about temporary separation from others
- use cognitive strategies focus on altering the unrealistic expectation that others should be endlessly available and totally consistent
- learn to accept that other people have the right to set limits and establish separate space
- reduce obsessive focus on making sure the partner is still there
- change the view that you must do what other people want you to do or else you are going to be left behind, that you're incompetent, or that you need other people to take care of you
- focus on choosing partners who are capable of making a commitment
- stop pushing partners away with behaviours that are too jealous, clinging, angry or controlling
- gradually learn to tolerate being alone and walk away from unstable relationships quickly, and become more comfortable in stable relationships.

MISTRUST / ABUSE

- therapy relationship provides the antidote to helplessness, terror and isolation as the experience provides feelings of safety, empowerment and reconnection
- reduce over-vigilance to abuse
- learn to recognise a spectrum of trustworthiness
- alter your view of worthlessness/self blame—stop making excuses for the abuser; place blame where it belongs
- venting anger is of primary importance
- gradually learn to trust honest people—share the secrets and memories with a partner or friend
- join a support group
- choose non-abusive partners—stop mistreating others and set limits with abusive people
- be less punitive when other people make mistakes
- allow people to get close and get intimate
- stop gathering evidence and keeping score about the things people have done to hurt you
- resist constantly testing others to see if they can be trusted
- don't take advantage of other people, thus prompting others to respond in kind.

EMOTIONAL DEPRIVATION

- write a letter to the parent (do not send), expressing the deprivation uncovered
- therapy relationship is central as you are taken care of, understood, and guided
- antidote to the deprivation is a warm, empathic, and protective environment where you can get many of your emotional needs met
- choose good quality partners and friends, identify your own needs, and ask to have these needs met in appropriate ways
- change exaggerated sense that others are acting selfishly or depriving you
- choose nurturing partners and friends and actively seek intimacy
- stop responding with excessive anger to mild levels of deprivation, or withdrawing or isolating when you feel neglected by others.

DEFECTIVENESS / SHAME

- therapy relationship is central and direct affirmation, praise, and focus on positive attributes is important
- examine the evidence for and against the defectiveness
- highlight your assets and reduce the significance assigned to your flaws
- rather than being inherent, flaws are behaviours learned in childhood that can be changed, or they are not flaws at all, but over-criticalness
- reattribute feelings of defectiveness to the criticalness of significant others
- flash cards listing good qualities are very helpful
- explore interpersonal situations that hold the potential to enhance your life
- work on choosing others who are supportive rather than critical—select partners who love and accept you
- learn to stop over-reacting to criticism—when it is valid criticism accept it and try to change; when it is not valid, simply state your point of view and affirm internally that the criticism is false
- set limits with hyper-critical people and stop tolerating maltreatment
- self-disclose more to significant others whom you trust—the more you share and are accepted, the more you will overcome your lifetrap
- decrease compensatory behaviours—stop overcompensating by appearing perfect, achieving excessively, demeaning others, or competing for status
- like all humans, your therapist makes mistakes and acknowledges flaws.

SOCIAL ISOLATION / ALIENATION

- group therapy may be useful, especially if you avoid friendships
- you are not as different from other people as you think—you share many qualities with all people, and some of the qualities you regard as distinguishing you are in fact universal
- focus on your similarities with other people as well as your differences—learn to identify subgroups of people who are like you
- challenge automatic negative thoughts that block you joining groups and connecting to people
- anxiety management can help you cope with social anxiety
- social skills training can assist you to learn important interpersonal and group skills.

DEPENDENCE / INCOMPETENCE

- there is a need to alter the view that you need constant assistance to function
- use flash cards, problem solving to make decisions and challenge negative thoughts
- explore the view that depending on others is a desirable way to live
- excessive dependence on others has a cost i.e., unfulfilled autonomy and self-expression
- learn relaxation, meditation, or other anxiety-reducing techniques
- there is need to confront anxiety-arousing situations via graded tasks e.g., rehearsals, rewards
- involve family members to reduce reinforcement for this lifetrap.

VULNERABILITY TO HARM OR ILLNESS

- stay focused on the long-term consequence of living a phobic lifestyle, such as lost opportunities for fun and self-exploration
- focus on the positive benefits of moving more freely in the world, such as a richer, fuller life
- overcoming anxiety and avoidance are a central focus of treatment
- lower your estimation of the probability of catastrophic events & raise your estimation of your capacity to cope
- de-catastrophising helps you to manage anxiety symptoms and panic attacks
- develop strategies to help give up magical rituals and safety signals, and face situations you fear
- explore non-phobic ways of viewing and handling acceptable levels of risk.

ENMESHMENT / UNDEVELOPED SELF

- identify your preferences and natural inclinations, and techniques to help you enact your true self are critical
- challenge the view that is preferable to be enmeshed than to have an identity of one's own—explore the advantages and disadvantages of developing a separate self
- identify how you are both similar to, and different from, your parental figure
- select partners and friends who do not foster enmeshment
- explore experiences you find inherently enjoyable; focus on senses—music, movies, books, food, activities.

FAILURE

- challenge the view that you are inherently inept and reattribute failure to inadvertently acting to defeat your attempts to succeed (it is the lifetrap that has caused the failure)
- highlight your success and skills, and do not ignore your accomplishments and accentuate the failures (be sure to notice each time you are successful)
- identify your skills by examining the evidence
- set realistic, long-term goals—lower any unrealistically high expectations
- getting angry at others for not recognising and accepting your strengths and limitations is an important part of the process of letting go emotionally of this lifetrap
- replace behaviours that surrender to, avoid, or overcompensate, with more adaptive behaviours
- set goals and plan graded tasks to meet the goals, and then carry out the tasks as homework.

ENTITLEMENT / GRANDIOSITY

- remind yourself what the consequences will be if you're not willing to change your sense of entitlement
- working on your interpersonal relationships is very important—you need to develop empathy and concern for others, that is, to recognise the damage you do when you misuse your power over others
- anger management and assertiveness training are important so that you can learn to replace overly-aggressive approaches to others with more assertive responses
- it is helpful to bring your partner to some therapy sessions to stop your entitled behaviour and to help your partner set limits—each of you can balance your own needs with the needs of the other
- you may have spent your life selectively focusing on your assets and minimising flaws and may not have a realistic view of your strengths and weaknesses—there is a need to develop a more realistically balanced view of yourself
- you have to follow the same rules as everyone else—you do not have special rights
- you have to treat people respectfully, as equals
- look at past situations in which you behaved in an entitled way and experienced negative consequences
- express acknowledgement of your parents' overindulgent behaviour in your childhood
- there is a need to discourage yourself from an over-emphasis on status and other superficial qualities in judging yourself and others.

INSUFFICIENT SELF-CONTROL / SELF-DISCIPLINE

- between an impulse and the action, you must learn to insert a thought—think through the consequences of giving in to the impulse before acting it out
- you can go through a series of graded tasks, such as becoming organised, performing boring or routine tasks, being on time, imposing structure, tolerating frustration, and restraining excessive emotions and impulses—start with simple tasks that are only slightly difficult—force yourself to do these tasks for a limited amount of time, then gradually increase the amount of time.
- learn techniques that help you control your emotions, such as time-out and self-control techniques (meditation, relaxation, distraction), and flash cards listing reasons you should control yourself and methods you can use to do it
- use imagery and role-playing to practice self-control and self-discipline—reward yourself when you are successful with these in your daily life (rewards might include acknowledging oneself, treating oneself with a special activity or gift, or free time).

SUBJUGATION

- your negative expectations about the consequences of expressing your needs and feelings to significant others are exaggerated—you need to learn that you are acting in a healthy manner when you express your needs and feelings appropriately
- using imagery and/or a writing exercise to express anger and assert your rights with the controlling parent or other authority figure—expressing anger is crucial (anger is not purely for ventilation, but to feel empowerment to stand up for yourself)
- it is vital to select relatively non-controlling partners and friends
- assertiveness techniques can help you learn to assert your needs and feelings with others—you can work to individuate from others
- you need to identify your natural inclinations and practice acting on them—use imagery and role-play, and then express these preferences for real as a homework assignment.

SELF-SACRIFICE

- you need to test your exaggerated perceptions of fragility and neediness of others
- increase your awareness of your own needs—for nurturance, understanding, protection, and guidance
- explore the imbalance of the “give-get ratio”—the ratio of what you are giving to what you are getting from significant others in your life (it should be approximately equal over time)
- experientially express sadness and anger about any unmet emotional needs—in imagery, confront those who deprived you
- express anger about becoming a parentified child—acknowledge your lost childhood
- in imagery, express anger toward others who deprive you in your current life, and behaviourally ask for what you need more directly, and come across as vulnerable instead of strong
- learn to select partners who are strong and giving rather than weak and needy—learn to set limits on how much you give to others
- keep track of how much you are giving and getting and when the balance is off, you can aim to make the ratio more equal (give less and ask for more)
- you need to stop acting so adult-like and strong, and instead be vulnerable and, at times, even child-like with those whom you trust.

APPROVAL-SEEKING / RECOGNITION SEEKING

- it is important to express your true self rather than continuing to seek the approval of others—when this desire is extreme it is dysfunctional
- examine the pros and cons of the lifetrapp
- weigh the advantages and disadvantages of discovering who you really are and acting on that, versus on continuing to focus on gaining other people’s approval
- if you continue to put all your emphasis on money, status, or popularity, you are not going to enjoy life fully—you will continue to feel empty and dissatisfied—it is not worth it to “sell one’s soul” for approval or recognition, as they are addictive and not fulfilling in a deep and lasting sense
- conduct experiments to explore your natural inclinations—self-monitor your thoughts and feelings, and use behavioural techniques to practice acting on your inclinations more frequently in your life
- tolerating the disapproval of others is an important goal—practice accepting situations in which others do not give you approval or recognition
- give up the approval-seeking addiction, tolerate the withdrawal, and then substitute other healthier forms of gratification.

NEGATIVITY / PESSIMISM

- examine the evidence—make predictions about the future and observe how infrequently your negative expectations come true
- self-monitor your negative, pessimistic thinking and practice looking at your life more objectively, based on logic and empirical evidence
- learn to stop exaggerating the negatives and focus more on the positives in your life—note corresponding changes in mood
- if a past negative event was controllable, work out how to correct the problem so it might not happen again
- logically, there is no basis for pessimism about a future event even if you have experienced uncontrollable negative events in the past
- challenge the idea that it is better to assume a negative, pessimistic perspective so you are not disappointed—if you expect something to go wrong, and it does go wrong, you do not feel that much better having worried about it—if you expect something to go right and it goes wrong, you do not feel that much worse
- identify cognitive distortions—whatever you gain by anticipating negative outcomes does not outweigh the cost of living day to day with chronic worry and tension
- list the advantages and disadvantages of assuming the worst—experiment with both positions, observing the effects on your mood
- conduct dialogues between your negative pessimistic side and your positive optimistic side which you are developing—you will see the benefits of taking a more positive stance toward life
- you may need to express anger and grief about painful events from the past so that you are able to leave these behind you—rather than being stuck in unresolved grief, you can move forward once again
- you can test the hypothesis that worrying leads to a better outcome, and you can test whether predicting negative outcomes or positive outcomes feels better
- engage in fewer unnecessary behaviours designed to prevent mistakes, and then observe the increase in satisfaction and pleasure you gain from implementing these changes
- as a homework exercise, do not complain to others—people get fed up with complaining and become impatient and will avoid you (even though, in the short term, complaining may get sympathy and attention)
- learn to ask more directly for caring, rather than seeking it from complaining, hence you will begin to meet your needs in healthier ways
- limit the time spent worrying by scheduling “worry time”—learn to notice when you are worrying and postpone it until the prescribed time
- you will also benefit from scheduling more activities for fun—life is not about preventing “bad things,” it is about getting “good things.”

EMOTIONAL INHIBITION

- you need to discuss and express both positive and negative emotions with significant others, and engage in more activities for fun
- find ways of being reinforced for expressing rather than restraining emotions
- accept the advantages of being more emotional, and thereby make the decision to fight the lifetraps
- you need to seek a balance on a spectrum of emotionality rather than seeing it as all-or-nothing—your goal is to reach a middle position
- evaluate the consequences of expressing your emotions—see that you can use good judgment about expressing emotions which allows you to feel more comfortable and willing to experiment
- practice discussing your feelings with other people, appropriately expressing both positive and negative feelings, playing and being spontaneous and doing activities designed for fun—maybe take a dance class, experiment sexually, do something on the spur of the moment, or play competitive sports (grade these tasks in terms of difficulty so that you gradually let go of your over-control)
- design tests of your negative predictions, writing down what you predict will happen if you express your emotions and what actually happens—compare the actual results with the predicted ones
- your therapist both models and encourages appropriate emotional expression
- group therapy can help with this lifetraps as you test and observe the expression of emotions with others.

UNRELENTING STANDARDS / HYPERCRITICALNESS

- learn to view performance as lying on a spectrum from “poor to perfect,” with many gradations in between, rather than as an all-or-nothing phenomenon
- conduct a cost-benefit analysis of perpetuating your unrelenting standards, asking yourself: “If I were to do things a little less well, or if I were to do fewer things, what would be the costs and benefits?”
- explore the advantages of lowering your standards—the benefits that would accrue to you health and happiness, all the ways you are suffering as a result of unrelenting standards, and the ways the lifetrap is damaging your enjoyment of life and relationships with others
- the cost of the lifetrap is greater than the benefits—this conclusion is the leverage that can motivate you to change
- reduce the perceived risks of imperfection—imperfection is not a crime—making mistakes does not have the extreme negative consequences you anticipate
- design experiments to help rein in the perfectionism—to do less and to do it less well—schedule how much time you are going to spend working versus doing other things, such as playing or connecting to others, setting lower standards and practicing adhering to them, intentionally doing tasks imperfectly, giving praise for the imperfect yet worthwhile behaviours of others, or “wasting time” interacting with friends or family purely for the sake of enjoyment or to enhance the quality of relationships
- monitor your mood as a consequence of carrying out the assignments and observe the effects on the moods of others
- learn to fight the guilt you feel when you do not try hard enough—it is acceptable to permit some imperfection
- your therapist models balanced standards in both their approach to therapy and in their portrayal of their own life.

PUNITIVENESS

- explore the advantage and disadvantages of punishment versus forgiveness
- list both the consequences of punishing a person and of being more forgiving, and reflect on the behaviour
- exploring the advantages and disadvantages helps you accept intellectually that punishment is not an effective way to deal with mistakes
- conduct dialogues between the punitive side and the forgiving side in which the two sides debate each other
- becoming convinced on a cognitive level that the cost of the lifetrap is greater than the benefit can help strengthen your resolve to battle the lifetrap
- practice more forgiving responses in situations where you have urges to blame yourself or others
- please note, your therapist has been modelling forgiveness throughout the therapy relationship—this has rightly emphasised compassion over punishment.

Additional information & suggestions: Young, J. E., & Klosko, J. S. (1993). *Reinventing your life*. NY: Plume.