

## Emotional Inhibition Schema

The emotional inhibition schema is defined as the excessive inhibition of spontaneous action, feeling or communication-usually to avoid disapproval by others, feelings of shame, or losing control of one's impulses. The most common areas of inhibition involve:

- inhibition of anger and aggression
- inhibition of positive impulses (e.g., joy, affection, sexual excitement, play)
- difficulty expressing vulnerability or communicating freely about one's feeling and needs
- or excessive emphasis on rationality while disregarding emotions

As Rune Moelbak discusses "In the book *"Meeting the Shadow"*, poet *Robert Bly* speaks of life as a process of hiding ever more things in a bag we drag behind us. Over time the bag grows larger and larger. From having an initial 360-degree personality, we gradually discover that not all aspects of ourselves invite positive reactions. To keep our sense of being loved and liked, we therefore start stuffing our bag with all the parts that aren't acceptable. Sadly, after we have gone through our childhood and adolescence, we end up with only a slice of ourselves out in the open.



### Why We Lose Touch with Our Emotions:

We learn to deal with our emotions often from how others deal with them. If people disapprove of our feelings or certain feelings, or criticize us, or jump in to provide solutions prematurely, or may be scared of our emotions we can start to see our emotions in the same way. When a bigger, wiser person doesn't regulate our emotions, they can be overwhelming. Or emotional expression can feel shameful or weak. In either case our "bag" of unwanted emotions

begins to grow. Perhaps

- a mother who is overly anxious about our desire to explore the world, can unwittingly convey the message that exploration is dangerous
- a father who becomes sullen when we express criticism, can convey the message that criticism is hurtful and should be avoided at all cost
- a peer who laughs at us for confiding in them, can make us feel weak or ashamed about sharing our vulnerabilities."

These experiences lead to an Emotional Inhibition Schema that often drives the Detached Protector – the mode that you flip into when being asked to be vulnerable, to let out emotions or express yourself. The Detached Protector can be like

- "a self-reliance so strong that we will never get hurt again by anyone, but may find ourselves lonely and unfulfilled
- disowning our rightful indignation and anger and allow ourselves to be abused or mistreated
- an inability to become excited because our fear of loss outweighs our courage to risk."

- a flat and unresponsive way of being in relationships – a wall that our partner can't get over and a wall that traps us in
- an involuntary shutdown when we actually do want to feel

Which description fits for you?

An emotional inhibition schema often edits out one whole emotion. For example we can edit out anger, so life can only be experienced with mixes of sadness and joy, but not anger (even healthy assertiveness). Or anger and fear, but not joy. It's like trying to create a spectrum of colours using only 2 basic colours, our life can get very limited

Each time we shrink from life or disavow a basic human emotion, we reinforce the schema. The result of cutting off access to part of who we are will often lead to depression, or permanent numbness.

### What can I do?

As you understand your schema, the origins and the way it impacts you, you can start to develop your Healthy Adult – who can make space for self-expression and difficult feelings. This can include:

- giving permission to feel and express a range of experiences
- making sure you have safe people to express yourself to
- seeing the impact of “bagging” all the parts you were told are not OK
- writing a letter to the person (or culture) who taught you it wasn't OK to express yourself and tell them the impact that has had on you (you probably won't send this letter, but writing it is important)



You will also need to find the Happy Child part of you that has been squashed or shamed. You might like to

- try watching funny YouTube clips and let yourself laugh out loud
- try a dancing /drama/drawing class
- get close to nature and allow yourself to be curious
- play with children and let their spontaneity rub off
- play a game from childhood with friends; Twister, charades, jumping in puddles
- put some music on and dance

The goal is being able to paint with all of the emotional colours you were born with and even make a mess sometimes

Quotations are taken from a blog post by Rune Moelbak <http://www.bettertherapy.com/blog/emotional-inhibition/>

Ruth Holt, 2019, 2022