Example: Integrating Feedback on Modes with Attachment – The Case of Tom

The following is an example of how to integrate the feedback provided under the Schema Therapy Model with regards to a client's mode map with a client's attachment style and relationship history. This feedback was delivered to Tom, and incorporated drawing on formal assessments such as the YSQ, the ASQ-SF, and well as narrative background/case notes on his life experiences (see the background document on "the Case of Tom" in Module 1). The feedback was also derived by using the AAI questions covered in Module 1 that ask a client to provide 5 adjectives to describe their mother, and their father.

The feedback script below was co-developed by Rita and Gery. Please note that the yellow highlights include the weaving in of attachment-based content.

Hi Tom

I wanted to use today's session to give you some feedback about how I understand some of the things that brought you to therapy. I have collated all the data from the questionnaires and tried to connect some dots regarding why you have come to therapy. Some of the things that you have said would go on your problem list include:

- Low self esteem
- Chronic depression
- Isolation
- Social Anxiety
- Avoidance in General
- Avoidance of R/ships

It appears that although you have had depressive episodes in the past, the one that occurred when you returned from your travels, was perhaps one of the most significant as there was significant amount of loss and shame to the point where you really avoided life and the world for several years, until now where you have sought help. That would have been a very painful place and being here today would have taken quite a bit of courage, so good on you for getting to this point.

I wont to show you this Mode Map I have developed for you, that gives me an idea of the sides of you that contribute to the things I listed earlier that brought you to therapy. A mode is essentially a side of you. And what you will see I have listed some other labels that we will call schemas, they are kind of character traits that have been shaped by our early experiences, I will try and make some connections about how I think these may have been shaped for you early on in life.

Well first, there is a healthy side to you that got you here, that is the side that although when in a lot of pain for all those years and was plagued with thoughts of killing himself, did not act on those thoughts because of the impact it would have on the people you cared about, particularly your mum. You may not see that part of you, but it is quite courageous and resilient.

You also have quite a strong internal critic that seems both punitive and critical, this not only impacts your self – esteem, your mood, social anxiety, but willingness to try new things without

© Gery Karantzas & Rita Younan (2022)

expecting perfection and some struggle. I think this critic has been around for some time and has become stronger over the years when you have had depressive episodes and not reached your potential. You can see I have listed the relevant schemas that fuel this part of you.

It seems that you have coped with this strong critic through avoidant coping strategies which consist of behavioural avoidance, emotional detachment or self-medication through prescription drugs or food. I do recall you saying that when you were an adolescent you would also use food as a way of comforting and disconnecting from how you felt inside. The ultimate disconnect was when you isolated yourself for several years post your travels for example. This would be to cope with a part of you that, in Schema Therapy terms, we call the Vulnerable Child, or the vulnerable part. When you connect with this part Tom, you feel like a burden, different, anxious, ashamed and like a failure. You go to all costs to hide this part of you from others, and yourself. Understandably you don't want to connect with this and thus those coping modes are there to save the day! And they do save the day, they work…in the short term anyway.

So how did these schemas develop? Which fuel these parts and make us vulnerable to all the things that have brought you to therapy? Schemas develop because of specific emotional needs not being met in our early caregiving environment.

From what I understand you describe your parents as being caring (we did that exercise last week that where you came up with 5 adjectives that describe your parents). Your mum was warm and supportive, but it sounds like you were a shy kid and fearful to try new things, and mum would sometimes do these things for you or allow you to avoid them, which can give kids the impression that you need people to do things for you and you can't rely on your own resources or how to get over these feelings that pull you into wanting to not try and get to the other end. This can result in a lack of internal discipline which may explain the undisciplined child mode that was elevated on your scores. Dad seemed to be physically around but somewhat distant at the same time…engaged in his own activities but was caring.

It was not until you were 12 when your parents divorced; your mum left and took your older brother with her and you had to stay with dad, and although he was caring, you were not so close to him. Your need to feel connected and safe was taken away from you when your mum left. Also, because mum was the person you turned to for love, comfort, and security, her leaving made you feel abandoned. This may have had you question her love for you, and this would have been something difficult for you to deal with, as it would be for anyone in your position. Adolescence is a time where our friends are the most important people in the world, and our sexual exploration begins, what happened with Tiffany, and you trying to kill yourself, and not having anyone to turn to, would have left you feeling isolated, rejected, and ashamed. At all times in life, especially when we are feeling most vulnerable, we need people there to support us – this involves having people understand what we are going through, helping us make good decisions in dealing with difficult times, and helping us to realise our own skills and abilities to work through times of challenge. My sense is that during these very difficult times, mum and dad we're not quite there for you in these important ways.

© Gery Karantzas & Rita Younan (2022)

I now want to focus on the patterns you've likely developed in the way that you interact with people. By people, I mean those who you have developed close and significant relationships with, such as your mother and father, and your past girlfriends…

What strikes about your patterns is that you have a strong desire for those close to you to like you and for them to see you in a positive light and to acknowledge your goodness. When in romantic relationships, you also tend to become very involved and are all consumed by the relationship, with that comes a desire to be physically and emotional close to your partner, but this can sometimes come across to your partner as you being somewhat pushy or overbearing in your need for love, connection and companionship. But at the same time, you are worried about whether you are worthy of the love of another, that may be why you also become so consumed when in romantic relationships.

On the flip-side, because of the experiences you've had with your mum and dad – mum leaving when you were 12, and your lack of closeness with dad, you became somewhat of a loner, choosing to rely on yourself, rather than turning to others to deal with challenging times. This also meant that you developed some negative opinions of others in general, such as, "its hard to fully trust people". Because you haven't necessarily wanted to turn to others in times of need, you've try to develop ways handling things on your own, such as downplaying problems and finding ways to cut-off any negative emotions you may experience (such as turning to substances or food to find comfort or relief).

Because of all this, your general ways of thinking and behaving in relationships is one of wanting to be in relationships, but also having quite strong fears about getting involved in relationships. This pattern can make it especially challenging for you to make relationships work and to feel satisfied and happy in your relationships.

© Gery Karantzas & Rita Younan (2022)