

[Transcript] Mamamia Out Loud / EXTRA: Jessie's Been Doing 'Schema Therapy'

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Mamma Mia Out Loud!

Hello Out Louders!

Over these Easter public holidays, we're not releasing regular episodes of Mamma Mia Out Loud.

We are actually having a little lie down,

but we wanted to share some of our favourite subscriber exclusive episodes with you as a treat for Easter Friday and Easter Monday.

We release subscriber exclusives every Tuesday and Thursday and you can catch up with all of them.

There are over a hundred of them right now via the link in our show notes.

So, first of all, I hope you enjoy this one.

We were chatting in our production meeting with producer Emma and she said she'd seen a few things lately floating around on social about something called schema therapy or schemas.

Have either of you heard of that before?

No, I think of a schema as like a scammer like Anna Delvy.

Okay. Well, it's S-C-H-E-M-A, so it's a little different.

What does that mean again?

I have been banging on about schema therapy for a few years because I started seeing a psychologist who did it and I've done a bit of research.

My twin sister has a degree in psychology

and she will say that schema therapy is the new sort of invoke therapy, right?

So, for a while, it was cognitive behavioral therapy.

CBT, I've had that. CBT, me too.

Which broadly, the idea is that you go in

and you have someone really challenge a lot of your ideas

and your perceptions of the world

and it's really useful and a lot of people still do it.

And it's about changing the way you think about things.

So, if you're scared of public speaking,

it's like what's the thought that comes into your head?

Oh, what if I can't think of anything to say?

Okay, well, then what will happen?

How about instead, what if you got up and you were brilliant?

Yeah.

And so, it's about intercepting negative thoughts

that take you down into a spiral

and cause you to feel unpleasant things.

Yes.

And because everyone's mental health issues are very different and we're learning more,

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psychology is obviously a science-based practice that is informed by incredible research. It's always changing. For some people, CBT is still great. I've been doing this schema therapy stuff. Schema therapy, I'm going to try and explain what it is from someone who is not at all a professional. It is about the moment to moment emotional states and coping responses that we all experience. So, when all of us are in a state of doing something uncomfortable, let's say the three of us get dumped, right? Mm-hmm. We will all have very different responses to it and it will trigger very different things within us that will then... Determine... ...a pattern of behavior... Okay. ...that will either be useful or extremely not useful and could lead to behaviors that are going to have very, very bad outcomes. So, basically, this has been triggered by life situations, genes. Many of these schemers lead us to overreact. You know how sometimes you'll be with someone and they'll overreact to a situation and it's clearly triggered something within them that you're like, I'm not getting this. Something's going on for you. I once had a therapist that used to say, what's going on for you right now, Pat? Yes, yes. And that was her way of saying, you've just had a reaction that doesn't seem connected directly to this thing that we're talking about. Exactly. I think, overall, there's something like 18 schemers and I'll explain a few examples in a second, but if you are someone who is really struggling with their mental health, you might have 14 of them, right? My psychologist has said, I've got two that really stand out and he explains them as sort of like having a back injury that flares up, that when you do something or when you face something, like if I would have metaphorically run a marathon,

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my back would get a bit like it would start to twinge
and that's your thing that you've just got to be aware of.
Is that your schema?
And that's my schema, right?
And the other metaphor he used, which I thought was brilliant,
was it's like code, your brain codes
and is always working out.
So for example, a bad life experience happens
and the three of us try to work out why it happens
and we come up with very different answers.
A schema is like the first line of code being
two plus two equals 10.
The rest of your working out can be completely logical,
but that premise was wrong.
Oh, I see, it's a glitch in the system.
It's a glitch in the system.
So let's work out what's going on with this glitch in the system
and what we're going to get to is a better,
more healthy pattern of behavior.
So it's not about trauma or looking back
or blaming parents or anything.
So is it like your lens through which you look at the world?
Good things and bad things?
It's where the dysfunction is.
I saw him recently because of obviously some anxieties
I've been feeling around.
As someone who's had anxiety and depression, I'm going,
okay, I'm pregnant.
This is a very vulnerable time.
Let's get on this.
Let's go and chat to him.
And I told him some of my fears
and what I'd been thinking about and he said,
if I was on a game show and it was a million dollar question
about how Jesse will react to pregnancy
and what her fears would be
and how her thoughts would develop,
schemers basically give me a blueprint
for exactly how you're feeling.
I could have guessed it.
I could have written three pages of Jesse will be scared
about this, this and this.
She thinks this is going to happen.
It makes you very predictable.

And do you find that reassuring?

Like you like the idea that there is a guide kind of?

Yes.

And that I can see something going on in my head
which feels so real and so natural and so...

Yeah.

Obvious.

And then I go, oh, hang on.

I know what's happening.

It's blah.

So is the idea to just learn what your schemers are?

I imagine that's the first thing, right?

To identify them.

And is the second part to dismantle them?

To dismantle them?

Or you can't dismantle them?

You're not going to eradicate them all together.

They're going to be your things that come up.

It's acknowledging that they're there.

And basically...

Do you give us some examples of them?

Having strategies.

So he said, I've got these two which are relatively common.

And this sounds obvious, but it gets interesting.

Number one is this fear of failing at something.

So failing professionally, failing at birth, failing at writing a book.

Yes, exactly right.

And then you've got these things that uphold it.

So he said it's sort of unrelenting high standards for things.

And I think that if I let those high standards drop,
the failure will happen.

Everyone will realize that I'm a big failure.

So it's very different to something like imposter syndrome,
but it's sort of related.

And he said, and this is kind of a related schema,
that it's about something that a lot of people experience
where they believe they have insufficient self-control.

So at the core of the belief is me believing
that if I didn't have unrelenting high standards,

I would lay in bed for the rest of my life and die a skeleton.

I believe I'm so lazy and like unmotivated and pathetic and like...

And it's weird because I think my mum has this as well.

It's this core belief that you're lazy.

So in order to combat that, you're like,

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I need unrelenting high standards,
which then become very toxic and dysfunctional in other ways.

Wow.

And it's related to this other one,
which is really specific.

And it was triggered last year with the leg thing,
but basically it's called vulnerability to harm
and it's a fear of illness, death and weakness.

It is a core belief that you are weaker than everyone else.

And he had a really good insight about childbirth
where it was sort of like, you think you're going to die.

Like you think you're not strong enough.

So everyone says, well, Holly did it, Maya did it.

And I go, I'm not strong because I'm really weak.

The pain will kill me.

Yeah.

Because I am weaker and I like have this vulnerability to harm
that other people don't have.

And so of course those two things,
when you're faced with pregnancy and newborn,
could those schemas come anymore to the surface?

And his thing is like...

So we have this whole conversation
and then at the end of the session, I go,
really good, I completely know what you're saying.

And you know what?

Childbirth is actually, it's like exposure therapy
because it's going to help fix my schemas
because I'm going to face it and it's going to be hard,
but I'm going to realise and he goes,
that's your unrelenting high standards.

Exactly.

It's just going back.

You're like, I'm going to beat my schema.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Actually, I'm not just going to do childbirth.

I'm going to do childbirth better than anyone has ever done childbirth.

And I'm going to fix my schema at the same time.

And he's like...

So there's 18.

There's 18.

So how is schema therapy different to other forms of therapy?

I think that it's more and you can kind of get to the bottom of it
and he knows a bit of my family history and stuff.

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I have heard this frustration from a lot of people who are suffering with current mental distress. So for example, they cannot get on a plane or they're having a really big relationship issue and they go and see a psychologist and the psychologist wants to talk about their relationship with their mum and they go, I'm happy to get there eventually. But I've spent a lot of money seeing a psychologist because I'm currently in distress. Sounds solutions focused.

Yes.

And the solution doesn't lie with your flawed mother. The solution as always lies with you and your own behaviour. And that's the thing that we can control.

Oh, I like that.

Which makes you feel a lot better, I think.

Well, a lot more empowered because it's short of a time machine.

You can't go back and change the way you were parented.

No.

Or change things that happen to you in your childhood.

You can't change those things.

But you can change the way that you look at the world and things that happen to you now with an awareness of how that's affected you.

Broken, and this is also something I really like, is that it's not about diagnosis.

It's not about, you know, I've had psychologists before say generalised anxiety disorder or whatever.

Actually not, especially useful for me.

What I need.

Especially the generalised part.

Yeah, exactly.

It's not about working out what you've got and all of that.

It's helping you in some parts and it's dysfunctional in others.

So how do we address the distress or whatever.

So I think if people have had trouble with therapy in the past, then looking into this as a potential approach could be very useful.

I have a question about the actual schemers.

Can you do a quiz or is it something that a therapist has to talk to you for a number of sessions and then?

I just remembered this.

That early on I did a very, very long questionnaire that was one of those ones that sort of like, do you feel like this?

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With this therapist.

I think I did it actually outside of the session
and then he looked at it and it was...

But he told you to do it.

I don't mean you just found the buzzfeed quiz.

Yes, yes.

I didn't do it online or anything.

Right.

But it's sort of like, is this a core belief?

So with things like anxiety, depression,

you'll get a question that's like,

do you secretly believe you're smarter than everyone else?

And you're kind of like...

Can anyone say my answer?

Some days I think that everyone is an idiot.

So it's interesting to look into though

and I think we'll be saying more and more about it.

Did you go to this guy because you wanted to do this kind of therapy
or he suggested it once you were...

He suggested it.

I had no idea.

Are there specialized schema therapists?

My friends who are in therapy right now,
almost all of them are doing schema therapy.

So it's a real thing.

So into it.

I'm doing a different kind of therapy at the moment.

I did Jungian before,

which is very childhood based in dreams and stuff.

And I just always,

she always wanted to hear my dreams

and I just would always feel too embarrassed.

And so I would always pretend I couldn't remember them.

Now I'm doing a type of therapy that's good for processing trauma
that's called EMDR,

which I think you've also done, Jesse,

where you look at lights

and it's about rapid eye movement

and something about the left side of the brain

and the right side of the brain.

And you have to think about this traumatic thing that happened

while your eyes are following these lights in this thing.

Like not everyone can do it.

You have to be trained.

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The practitioner has to be trained.
But it's all about the idea that for some people,
if you're having trouble
and you're sort of coming back and back to something
that's happened to you,
trauma is often not processed
through the part of the brain that processes other things.
I kind of think about it like that movie.
Is it Inside Out?
Hmm.
Where they have all the emotions and those little marbles.
And they try to carry them and put them in the right places.
These are Riley's memories
and they're mostly happy, you'll notice, not to brag.
But the really important ones are over a year.
I don't want to get too technical,
but these are called core memories.
All your memories and your experiences,
they get filed away, you know, over in the warehouse.
Trauma, not for everybody, but for some people, get stuck.
Almost in short-term memory.
So it feels like a current, ongoing threat.
Rolling around.
And that's why people who have post-traumatic stress disorder
will often have flashbacks and be triggered
and all of those things,
because that original memory of the trauma
was not processed properly.
So this is about trying to get it processed
and sent off to the warehouse.
And it sounds so woo-woo and silly.
And people are like,
oh, is that an alternative therapy?
No, life therapist is not alternative.
It's scientific based and it's new
and there is really good evidence to it.
I have a question that you might not know the answer to,
but if you've reached out for mental health help,
because you are, as you say, have got a current issue
and you go and you get a mental health plan from your GP,
do you get to choose?
Do you go, I want to do schema.
I don't want to do this.
I don't want to do that and get it on your mental health plan.

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Yeah.

As long as they're registered with Medicare,
they're practitioner.

Yep.

So if it's someone who's just going to wave a crystal
around your head or something, they're not registered.
But as long as they're registered as a certified practitioner,
mental health practitioner,
the type of therapy that they do is kind of irrelevant.

Yeah.

You still get the rebate,
but the thing to look out for is prohibitive cost
because there are some psychologists
that are really, really expensive
and there are some that are more affordable.

Mine is within a GP.

And so I think that makes it a little bit more accessible,
although there is a gap every time.

And that means that there are a lot of people
who can't afford 10 sessions.

Very often you get your 10 sessions.

It's not always easy to find the right person for you.

And then you're twisting sessions.

But persevere, ask friends.

My best therapist recommendations have come from friends.

In fact, it was funny.

I just got a text from a girlfriend right now
before we walked in to say she just had her first session
with a therapist that I'd recommended to her.

And she loved it.

And you can read,

I'm annoyed I didn't do this for a while
because sometimes your GP that's prescribing it will go,
oh, I just see this person down the road.

Really read what they specialize in
because sometimes you'll read it and you go,
I didn't even know that was something you can specialize in,
but that's me.

Like I really relate to that.

There are people who specialize in postnatal depression
or trauma or anxiety or various things.

And also have a think about...

Or anxiety or depression.

Yeah, some people feel a lot more comfortable

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speaking to a woman

or a lot more comfortable speaking to a man

and certain ages can be...

I've never had a male therapist,

but I kind of would like to try one.

Yeah, it's really good.

Thanks for listening to this subscriber episode.

Please tell us what you thought.

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