

Psychoeducational Resources Website – Self-esteem

Questioning our core beliefs

The exercises on this work sheet will look at ways of assessing negative core beliefs about yourself and at ways of noticing and strengthening alternative, more positive beliefs.

If our negative beliefs have been around for a very long time, we may find they can dominate our mind and pop in as self-critical thoughts, often outside of our awareness. Accepting that this is how the mind works – that we cannot control the thoughts that just pop into our minds is a tough lesson. At the same time, acceptance also means learning that what our minds say as ‘negative thoughts’ are often not true. Think about this statement for a moment:

Thoughts are just thoughts; they are not facts.

Core beliefs are the way we think about ourselves deep down. Negative core beliefs lie at the heart of low self-esteem and can be around since we were young children. Because our core beliefs have been with us for most of our lives, they are not easy to shift and we may never completely rid ourselves of them, but we can question their accuracy.

Questioning how accurate our core beliefs are can help us overcome low self-esteem.

Core beliefs can be identified by statements that begin “I am...”

Some examples:

“I am...”

- A failure
- Useless
- Weak and vulnerable
- Bad
- Not a worthwhile person
- Stupid

Step 1

Think about some of your own negative mantras and list them, *be kind to yourself!*

Negative Core Beliefs

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Step 2

Once you have your list, start with one that doesn't cause you too much pain and write it below. (Once you feel more confident about these exercises, you can move onto one of your more meaningful negative core beliefs.)

My negative core belief

Thinking about this belief right now, write down as a percentage how much you believe this statement. If you believe it to be true all the time, write 100%. If you only believe it most of the time you may choose 75%.

Right now, I believe this statement with _____ per cent certainty.

Step 3

How does this core belief make you feel and how strong are those feelings?

Use the grid below to capture how you feel when you think about this core belief.

I feel Name the feeling in one word	Strength of feeling Where 100% means as strong as possible	Feelings in my body Do you notice any bodily sensations when you feel this way?	Any Different Feelings Log anything else you wish here
For example: Frightened	90%	Heart races, hands sweat	High alert Can't relax

Step 4

In the grid below start to capture any evidence that demonstrates that the core belief you hold is not completely true all the time.

Negative Core Belief "I am _____"
Evidence and experiences that mean this negative core belief is not completely true all of the time
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.

Most people find it difficult to notice any evidence or experiences that do not fit with their deeply held negative core beliefs.

The human mind works by searching for evidence that confirms our beliefs *are* true and *ignores* evidence that does not fit with our beliefs so take your time to complete this part of the process.

If there are people you feel you can trust perhaps ask them to provide evidence or experiences that do not fit with your beliefs.

Look back over your whole life to see if you can recall evidence or an experience that does not fit with the negative core belief you are working with.

Step 5

Ask yourself again how much you believe your negative core belief now you have seen all the evidence?

I now believe the negative core belief is true with _____ per cent certainty.

Do not be too surprised if the percentage is still higher than you would wish; remember our negative core beliefs have been around much longer than the few weeks it has taken you to complete this exercise. Beliefs that have been with us for most of our lives are difficult to change; therefore it is important to keep a log of evidence and experiences that do not fit with our negative core beliefs.