

## Stop Shoulding on Yourself! Transform *Should* ⇒ into *Could*

This tool is designed to help your brain transition out of the negative, perfectionistic, emotional, or self-sabotaging mindset into your rational, problem-solving and wise mind.

**1. Begin by acknowledging your own “should” list.** Make a list of things that you believe you “should” change, start, stop, improve, increase, or decrease. You may use the list below or create your own.

Examples: Your “*shoulds*” may be physical, measurable, or tangible changes such as:

- |                                        |                                    |                                          |
|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Eat healthier | <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer | <input type="checkbox"/> Contact friends |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Get organized | <input type="checkbox"/> Exercise  | <input type="checkbox"/> De-clutter      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Budget money  | <input type="checkbox"/> Vote      | <input type="checkbox"/> Finish projects |



Or the “*shoulds*” may be psychological, abstract, or intangible changes such as:

- |                                       |                                         |                                               |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Worry less   | <input type="checkbox"/> Open up        | <input type="checkbox"/> Think positively     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Be assertive | <input type="checkbox"/> Delegate       | <input type="checkbox"/> Improve self-esteem  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Forgive      | <input type="checkbox"/> Set Boundaries | <input type="checkbox"/> Stop people-pleasing |



**What *SHOULD* you do?** Finish the sentence. Write as many as you wish using more paper.

*I should* \_\_\_\_\_

*I should* \_\_\_\_\_

*I should* \_\_\_\_\_

**Now fine-tune your list:**

⇒ **Reality Check. Cross off the unrealistic “*shoulds*” from your list.** For example, “*I should make my spouse stop drinking*” is unrealistic. You cannot control other people. Delete items that are not within your control. Replace with items that are within your control. “*I should seek help and support for myself to address alcoholism in my marriage.*”

⇒ **Cross off “*shoulds*” that have action plans and are a work in progress.**

Example: “*I should eat healthier.*” If you are currently practicing good nutrition, reducing processed foods, following the advice of your physician or nutritionist, then cross healthier eating off your *should* list. You are already living it! This is not a perfection list. If you would respect a friend who did all that you do, then respect yourself too with self-compassion.

## Transforming **SHOULD** into **COULD**

*Also known as taking responsibility*

**2. Transformation.** Insert the remaining items from your *should list* into the blanks below.

⇒ Transform every “**should**” item on your “**should**” list into a “**could**” below:

If I really wanted to I **could** \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Insert your “*should*” item here)

If I really wanted to I **could** \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Insert your “*should*” item here)

If I really wanted to I **could** \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Insert your “*should*” item here)

⇒ When transforming your “**should**” into a “**COULD**,” notice how your body feels.

“**Shoulds**” create judgment, worry, shame, doubt, obligation or resentment.

“**Coulds**” inspire hope and possibility. Curiosity sets in. Your mind opens.

⇒ Now finish the sentence. Discover your resistance to change by acknowledging your reasons for *not* moving forward with each item on your list.

If I really wanted to I **could** —BUT I do not because: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

If I really wanted to I **could** —BUT I do not because: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

If I really wanted to I **could** —BUT I do not because: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

**3. Dealing with the “buts”.** Now that you’ve identified your “buts”, you decide what happens next. Address each “but” with **intention** and **curiosity**.

**I could—but I don’t because:**

- \*I do not know how
- I do not have time.
- It is too hard.
- I do not have the money.
- It is not a priority.
- I am too tired.
- I am afraid.
- I do not want to.

**Intention: How do I intend to face this “but”?**

\***Do I validate the obstacle** by removing this should/could item from my priorities and move on toward items I intend to address?

\***Do I empower change** by problem-solving?

**Curiosity: What are my choices?**

\*What are my values and priorities?

\*How have others overcome this obstacle?

\*What supports, resources, or mindset is required for resolving this but?

\* When you catch yourself thinking

*“I could but I don’t know how”.*

### Consider this:

You are not alone. Other people have successfully overcome whatever obstacles you struggle with. Curiosity leads to research— Google it! Not only will you find a book dealing with this specific hurdle, you may also find a community support group, a YouTube video or even a *Lifetime* made for TV movie. If your “but” is so unique that nothing shows up in Google—then you are in luck! Contact an agent and write your own book!

**If you choose to face your “but” head on---** (take a moment to pause, yes that was funny) then address your obstacle with the same wise counsel you would offer while helping others.

### I could, but I don’t because:

*“I could, but I don’t have time.”*

*“I could, but it’s too hard.”*

*“I could, but I don’t have the money.”*

*“I could, but I’m afraid.”*

*“I could but I don’t want to.”*

### Addressing your “but” head on Focus on your intention and on curiosity

- I’m the adult in charge of my life. I make my schedule. How do other adults make time? I can prioritize this to make time.
- Yes, it’s hard, but others have done it. If I break it down into small steps, if I ask for help, then I could do it. I can do hard things.
- Money is tight, this is true. I wonder how other people have accomplished this without money. Are there options within my budget?
- Fear does not mean failure. I could discuss my fears with mentors. I could build my confidence and my coping skills. Eventually, I will be ready to do it— afraid.
- If I do *not want* to—AND I *have to*, then I will change my attitude. I will make it enjoyable with rewards, supports and I will gamify it!
- If I do *not want* to— AND I *do not have to*, then I will take this item off my “should” list. I only spend energy on what I **choose** to change.

\*The term “*shoulding on yourself*” was first coined by cognitive behavioral psychologist Albert Ellis. The term gained popularity when used by author John Bradshaw in his bestselling book, *Healing the Shame That Binds You* (1988).