

The Talking Room – Low Self Esteem - 2

Identifying Negative Core Beliefs

Your negative core beliefs reflect the negative, broad, and generalised judgements you have made about yourself, based on some negative experiences you might have had during your earlier years (e.g. “I am a failure,” or “I am no good”). If you are not clear as to what your negative core beliefs are you need to first pin them down and identify them before you can start changing them.

To uncover those negative core beliefs, you will need to think about the implications of the specific clues and information you already have, that is, think about what they say about the overall view you have of yourself.

Some areas to consider in identifying your negative core beliefs include:

- Negative life experiences you have already identified
- Biased expectations you have noted
- Negative self-evaluations you have become aware of
- Difficulties you had thinking of your positive qualities
- What you fear will be the outcome if you don't fulfil your old rules.

Important questions to ask yourself throughout this 'identification' process are: What does this information mean about me as a person? What does this clue say about who I am?

Adjusting Negative Core Beliefs

Once you have identified the negative core beliefs which you hold about yourself, you can take steps to adjust these and develop more balanced, helpful beliefs about who you are as a person. The steps are:

1. Choose a negative core belief to work on.

Note how much you believe the negative core belief now, when it's most convincing, and when it's least convincing. Note how the negative core belief makes you feel.

2. Develop a new, balanced core belief.

When developing a new core belief, you want to aim for something that is more positive, balanced, and realistic. Think of something that is a more accurate reflection of yourself. It is important that the work you do on your negative core

beliefs is not just about squashing the belief that you have been carrying around, but also about promoting a new balanced view of yourself. The important thing is that the new belief is more balanced, weighing up all the information available, and including both your strengths and weaknesses (e.g. “I am great at many things, average at others, and weaker in some areas, just like anyone”). Make sure that you are not painting an overly positive view of yourself (e.g. “I am 100% perfect”), as this will be unrealistic, and it is unlikely that you will believe it.



3. Examine the evidence for and against your old belief.

To start to chip away at your old negative core belief, we first need to examine the evidence you base this belief on. What evidence do you have for this negative view of yourself? What experiences do you use to justify this negative core belief?

Next it is time to assess how credible and accurate the evidence is, like being a lawyer who questions how good the evidence is. This is where you also ask yourself: Are there alternative ways of understanding this evidence? Are there other explanations you have not considered? Are there other ways of interpreting or making sense of the evidence, other than condemning who you are as a person?

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4. Find support for your new belief.

Firstly, gather evidence that is consistent with this new view of yourself, paying attention to evidence from the past/present and looking out for appropriate evidence in the future. Secondly, you need to experiment with this new view of yourself. This means that you need to test it out, try it on for size, and act in ways that are consistent with the new you. Ask yourself how someone who believed this kinder view of themselves might act or behave? What things could you do to obtain more evidence for your new balanced core belief? What new experiences might further support this new perspective you are developing?

5. Evaluating your new & old beliefs.

Once you have been through the step-by-step process for adjusting your negative core beliefs, it is important to reflect on what impact this process has had on you. You can do this by re-rating how much you now believe your old negative core belief and compare it to how much you now believe your new balanced core belief. This rating might be something you keep coming back to and reviewing - because these new beliefs will tend to further strengthen over time with practice, and the old beliefs weakened.