

The 12 Self-defeating beliefs

1. I need love and approval from those significant to me, and I must avoid disapproval from any source.
2. To feel happy and be worthwhile I must achieve, succeed at whatever I do, and make no mistakes.
3. People should always do the right thing. When they behave obnoxiously, unfairly or selfishly, they must be blamed and punished.
4. Things must be the way I want them to be, otherwise life will be intolerable.
5. My unhappiness is caused by things which are outside my control, so there is little I can do to feel any better.
6. I must worry about things that could be dangerous, unpleasant or frightening, otherwise they might happen.
7. I can be happier by avoiding life's difficulties, unpleasantness and responsibilities.
8. Everyone needs to depend on someone stronger than themselves.
9. Events in my past are the cause of my problems, and they continue to influence my feelings and behaviours now.
10. I should become upset when other people have problems and feel unhappy when they're sad.
11. I shouldn't have to feel discomfort and pain. I can't stand them and must avoid them at all costs.
12. Every problem should have an ideal solution, and it is intolerable when one can't be found.

12 rational alternatives

In the left-hand column are the 12 irrational beliefs, with a rational alternative beside each

Irrational beliefs

Rational alternatives

I need love and approval from those significant to me, and I must avoid disapproval from any source.

Love, approval and respect from others are all good things - but they are not absolute necessities for my survival. And while I dislike disapproval, it is uncomfortable - not catastrophic; I can stand it - as I have many times before. Better that I learn to accept myself, independently of what others think of me.

To feel happy and be worthwhile I must achieve, succeed at whatever I do, and make no mistakes.

I will always seek to achieve as much as I can, but unending success and competence is unrealistic. Better I just accept myself as a person, separate from my performance.

People should always do the right thing. When they behave obnoxiously, unfairly or selfishly, they must be blamed and punished.

It is unfortunate that people sometimes do bad things. But humans are not yet perfect, and upsetting myself will not change that reality.

Things must be the way I want them to be, otherwise life will be intolerable.

There is no law which says that things have to be the way I want. It is disappointing when they are not, but I can stand it — especially if I avoid

awfulising about frustration and demanding that it not happen.

My unhappiness is caused by things outside my control, so there is little I can do to feel any better.

Many external factors are outside my control. But it is my thoughts (not the externals) which cause my feelings - and I can learn to control my thoughts.

I must worry about things that could be dangerous, unpleasant or frightening, otherwise they might happen.

Worrying about things that might go wrong will not stop them happening. It will, though, ensure I get upset and disturbed right now!

I can be happier by avoiding life's difficulties, unpleasantnesses and responsibilities.

Avoiding problems is only easier in the short term — putting things off can make them worse later on. It also gives me more time to worry about them!

Everyone needs to depend on someone stronger than themselves.

Relying on someone else can lead to dependent behaviour. It is OK to seek help, as long as I learn to trust myself and my own judgement.

Events in my past are the cause of my problems, and they continue to influence my feelings and behaviours now.

The past cannot influence me now. My current beliefs cause my reactions. I may have learned these beliefs in the past, but I can choose to analyse and change them in the present.

I should become upset when other people have problems and feel unhappy when they're sad.

It is good to empathise with and help others, but I can't change their problems and bad feelings by getting myself upset.

I shouldn't have to feel discomfort and pain. I can't stand them and must avoid them at all costs.

Why should I in particular not feel discomfort and pain? I don't like them, but I can stand them. Also, my life would be very restricted if I always avoided discomfort.

Every problem should have an ideal solution, and it is intolerable when one cannot be found.

Problems usually have many possible solutions. It is better to stop waiting for the perfect one and get on with the best available. I can live with less than the ideal.