

CHAPTER EIGHT



Core beliefs

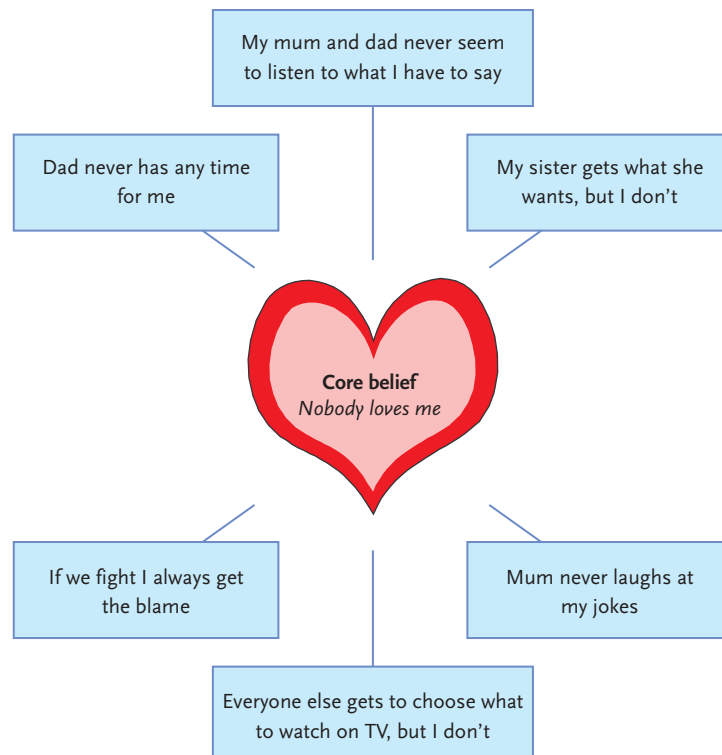
Core beliefs are the fixed statements/ideas that we have about ourselves. They help us to predict what will happen and help us to make sense of our world. These core beliefs are formed in childhood, and our early experiences develop them into fairly rigid assumptions about:

- ▶ how we see ourselves
- ▶ how we judge what we do
- ▶ how we view the future.

Our automatic thoughts echo our **core beliefs**. The more negative our core beliefs are, the more negative our automatic thoughts will be.

▶ Unlovable Marvin

Marvin had a core belief that no one loved him. This resulted in his having lots of automatic thoughts that proved to him that this was right.



We could probably see things in a slightly different way, but Martin regarded all of these things as evidence that no one loved him.

Identifying core beliefs

The **Thought Tracker** has found a useful way to help you to identify your core beliefs.

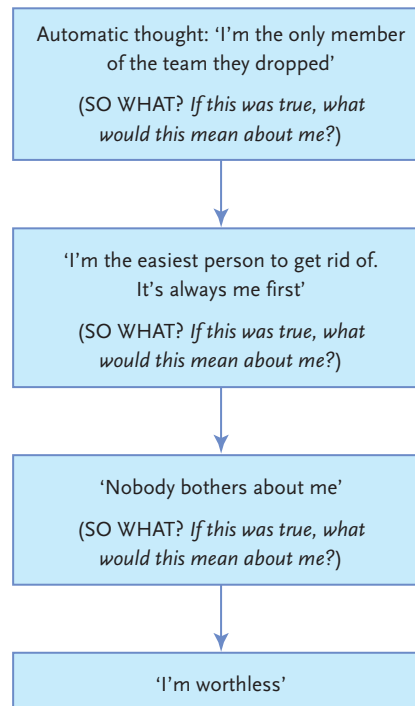


This is called the **SO WHAT? method**.

- ▶ Take a negative thought and keep asking yourself **'SO WHAT? If this was true, what would this mean about me?'**
- ▶ Keep repeating this question until you find your core belief.

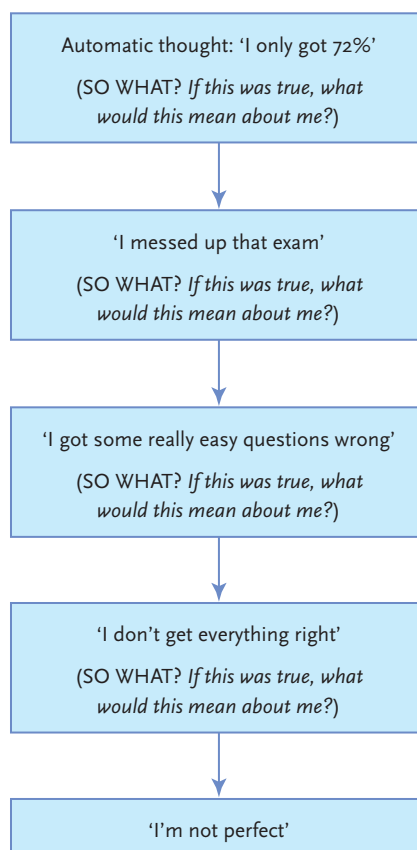
▶ Sally is dropped from the team

Sally felt really down after she was dropped from the netball team. She had lots of negative thoughts, so the **Thought Tracker** helped her to identify her core beliefs.



▶ James takes his exams

James received his examination marks and became very upset. Although he had obtained good marks, they didn't seem good enough to him. With the help of the **Thought Tracker**, James explored his thoughts and identified his core beliefs.



Identifying core beliefs can help you to understand why you always end up thinking the same way and how you get stuck in your negative trap.

- ▶ Sally has a **core belief that she is worthless**. This helped her to understand why she was always putting herself down and devaluing her achievements.

Identifying core beliefs can help you to understand why the same problems keep occurring.

- ▶ James has a **core belief that he must be perfect**. He tries to avoid attempting anything new or different in case he finds that he can't do it.

Challenging core beliefs

Once we have identified our core beliefs, the next step is to test them and check to see whether they really are true.

Core beliefs are like our automatic thoughts – we hear them and accept them as true without really questioning them. But we need to ask ourselves the following questions.



Are we seeing the whole of the story or are we looking through **negative glasses**?

Are we missing any evidence that would suggest that this belief is not true?

The **Thought Tracker** has found a useful way to help us to check our core beliefs.



We need to look for evidence that **does not support** our core belief.

No matter how small or unimportant it may seem, we must **FIND IT**.

▶ Peter is bad

Peter had a core belief that he was a bad person. He thought that he always made people unhappy, always got into trouble and was always being told off.

The **Thought Tracker** helped Peter to test this belief. For one day, Peter kept a diary of what happened in each of his lessons at school. He had to look for evidence that would question his core belief, so he wrote down whenever someone said something good or nice about him. After all, you can't be a bad person if people say good things about you!

At the end of the day, Peter's diary looked like this:

Maths *Teacher praised Peter for doing his homework*
English *Nothing said*
Science *Teacher made three positive comments about Peter's work and one comment about his positive attitude*
History *Nothing said*
English *Nothing said*
Friend's *Peter was invited back to Richard's house after school.*

At the end of the day Peter looked at his diary. He hadn't got into trouble at all, some people had said good things about him, and Richard wanted to see him after school.

Although Peter saw these things, they were not strong enough to make him question his core belief. He dismissed what happened, saying 'It's not usually like that'.

The **Thought Tracker** helped again. Peter was making a **thinking error** – he was having a **downer**, positive doesn't count. The **Thought Tracker** suggested that Peter should keep the diary going for a week. This would check whether today had been a 'one-off' event or whether perhaps things were better than Peter realized.

Talk with someone else

Because core beliefs are very strong you may, like Peter, find that they are fairly difficult to challenge. This can lead you to reject any evidence that might suggest your core belief is not always right.

At these times it can be useful to talk with someone else. Talk with a good friend or someone close to you and find out whether they see things the same way as you. Another person may provide new information or may highlight things that you find difficult to see or believe.



- ▶ We are very good at looking for and finding evidence that supports our core beliefs. We do this automatically.
- ▶ Keeping a diary or a list of evidence that disagrees with your core beliefs is a useful way of checking whether they are really true.
- ▶ If you find this difficult, talk with someone else. You may be trapped and unable to remove your negative glasses. However, someone else may be able to point out the things that you are overlooking.



Identifying core beliefs

Take two of your most common automatic thoughts and use the 'SO WHAT?' technique to discover your core beliefs.

My negative thought:

► SO WHAT? *If this was true, what would this mean about me?*



► SO WHAT? *If this was true, what would this mean about me?*





Identifying core beliefs

My negative thought:

► SO WHAT? *If this was true, what would this mean about me?*



► SO WHAT? *If this was true, what would this mean about me?*





Challenging core beliefs

Select one of your core beliefs and over the next week record **any evidence**, no matter how small, that would suggest that this core belief is not always true.

CORE BELIEF:

EVIDENCE THAT DOES NOT SUPPORT IT:



Common beliefs



Use the Thought Thermometer on page 87 to rate how much you agree with each of the following statements.

It is important to be better than others at everything I do

Thought rating:



Other people are better than me

Thought rating:



No one loves or cares about me

Thought rating:



THINK GOOD – FEEL GOOD



It is important that my parents/
carers are involved in everything I do

Thought rating:



I am not responsible for what
I do or say

Thought rating:



I am a failure

Thought rating:



I am more important/special
than others

Thought rating:

THINK GOOD – FEEL GOOD



People will be cross or upset if I say the things I really want to say

Thought rating:



I must not show my feelings to others

Thought rating:



It is more important to put other people's wishes and ideas before my own

Thought rating:



Others are out to get or hurt me

Thought rating:

THINK GOOD – FEEL GOOD



No one understands me

Thought rating:



People I love will never be there for me

Thought rating:



I need other people to help me get by

Thought rating:



Bad things happen to me

Thought rating: