

What are Core Beliefs?

Core beliefs are a person's most central ideas about themselves, others, and the world. These beliefs act like a lens through which every situation and life experience is seen. Because of this, people with different core beliefs might be in the same situation, but think, feel, and behave very differently.

Even if a core belief is inaccurate, it still shapes how a person sees the world. Harmful core beliefs lead to negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, whereas rational core beliefs lead to balanced reactions.

Situation: Two people with different core beliefs receive a bad grade on a test.		
Person	Core Belief	Reaction
A	➡ "I am a failure."	➡ Thought: Of course, I failed... why bother? Feeling: Depressed Behavior: Makes no changes.
B	➡ "I do anything, when I give my best effort."	➡ Thought: I did poorly because I didn't prepare. Feeling: Disappointed Behavior: Plans to study before the next test.

Common Harmful Core Beliefs

Core beliefs are often hidden beneath surface-level beliefs. For example, the core belief "no one likes me" might underlie the surface belief "my friends only spend time with me out of pity".

Helpless	Unlovable	Worthless	External Danger
"I am weak"	"I am unlovable"	"I am bad"	"The world is dangerous"
"I am a loser"	"I will end up alone"	"I don't deserve to live"	"People can't be trusted"
"I am trapped"	"No one likes me"	"I am worthless"	"Nothing ever goes right"

Consequences of Harmful Core Beliefs

Core beliefs can distort our reality and make us unhappy. Core beliefs should benefit the holder of those beliefs. If they do not, they need to be removed.

Interpersonal Problems	Mental Health Problems
difficulty trusting others	depression
feelings of inadequacy in relationships	anxiety
excessive jealousy	substance abuse
overly confrontational or aggressive	difficulty handling stress
putting others' needs above one's own needs	low self-esteem

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Facts About Core Beliefs

Core Beliefs are not as large and powerful as we believe. They are rather like stuck grains of sand that block our thinking through an hourglass. When we remove them, that small change creates a large shift, but not a glorious transformation like so many expect.

- People are not born with core beliefs—they are learned.
- Core beliefs usually develop in childhood, or during stressful or traumatic periods in adulthood.
- Information that contradicts core beliefs is often ignored.
- Negative core beliefs are not necessarily true, even if they *feel* true.
- Core beliefs tend to be rigid and long-standing. However, they can be changed.

Decide to Make Some Changes

There is no better time than right now to decide you want to rid yourself of unbeneficial core beliefs. Deciding to change the beliefs you no longer want is the hardest step. Identifying those beliefs is not that difficult and replacing them with better beliefs is easy when you know how.