Core beliefs: the deeper layer

Where the automatic thoughts come from.

Automatic thoughts are the thoughts that pop up in the moment. Underneath them sit broader beliefs about ourselves, other people and the world. We usually picked these up early in life, when they made sense of what was happening around us.

Early experiences	What happened around me growing up. How I was treated, what was expected, what was praised or criticised.
↓	
Core beliefs	Deep, absolute conclusions. "I am not good enough." "People leave." "The world is dangerous."
↓	
Rules for living	Rules that protect me from the core belief. "If I never make mistakes, nobody can criticise me."
↓	
Triggers	Situations where the rule is broken or under threat. A mistake at work. A friend cancels.
↓	
Automatic thoughts	"I have messed everything up." "She does not want to know me."

Things to know about core beliefs

- They feel like facts, but they are conclusions you drew when you were younger and had less to go on.
- They work like a filter. Evidence that fits gets noticed. Evidence that does not fit gets ignored or explained away.
- They can change, slowly, as you collect the evidence the filter has been leaving out.

Common themes

Core beliefs tend to cluster around being unlovable ("I am not wanted"), being helpless ("I cannot cope"), or being worthless ("I am bad"). Most people have a positive set too, which low mood can hide.

My notes and questions

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Evidence log for a new belief

A daily record of evidence that supports a new, fairer belief.

Name _____ Date _____

The old belief	The new, fairer belief I am building

Each day, write down anything that fits the new belief, however small. The old belief will tell you it does not count. Write it down anyway.

Date	What happened	What this says about the new belief
Mon 3rd	*A colleague asked my opinion on her report.*	*People do value what I think.*

How much do I believe the new belief at the end of the week?

0 — 10 — 20 — 30 — 40 — 50 — 60 — 70 — 80 — 90 — 100

Not at all — Completely

The positive data log was described by Christine Padesky (1994).

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