

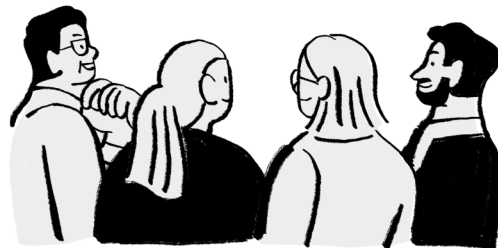
Negative Core Beliefs

Core beliefs matter because they affect how we perceive and react to the world. Depending on our particular core beliefs, which you can explore in our worksheet, we may have very different reactions to the same situation. This worksheet is designed to help you learn and explore three ways that core beliefs affect us.

To note, core beliefs can be positive or negative, and true or untrue. Usually, issues like trauma, depression, anxiety, and chronic stress lead to *untrue, negative* core beliefs. This worksheet will explore common untrue, negative core beliefs that many people experience.

1 Core beliefs affect our thoughts

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) teaches us that negative core beliefs can create negative automatic thoughts - mental knee-jerk reactions that we are not in control of. Core beliefs (like “I’m not likeable” or “I’m not worthy”) can influence what we notice about certain situations, and the worries (“Are they laughing at me?”) or conclusions (“I’ll never fit in”) that enter our thoughts.



My coworkers are talking and laughing

Why are they together without me?

We're not always aware of how our core beliefs work in the background to interpret situations and create automatic thoughts

I'm not capable

I'm not likeable

I'm not worthy

“Are they laughing about my latest presentation?
Even if I tried to join them,
I would be too awkward.”

“Are they laughing at me?
Are they not interested in
talking to me?
Am I missing out?”

“I’ll never fit in with them.
I’ll never be good enough.
They deserve to make friends
at work, but I don’t.”

*This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.



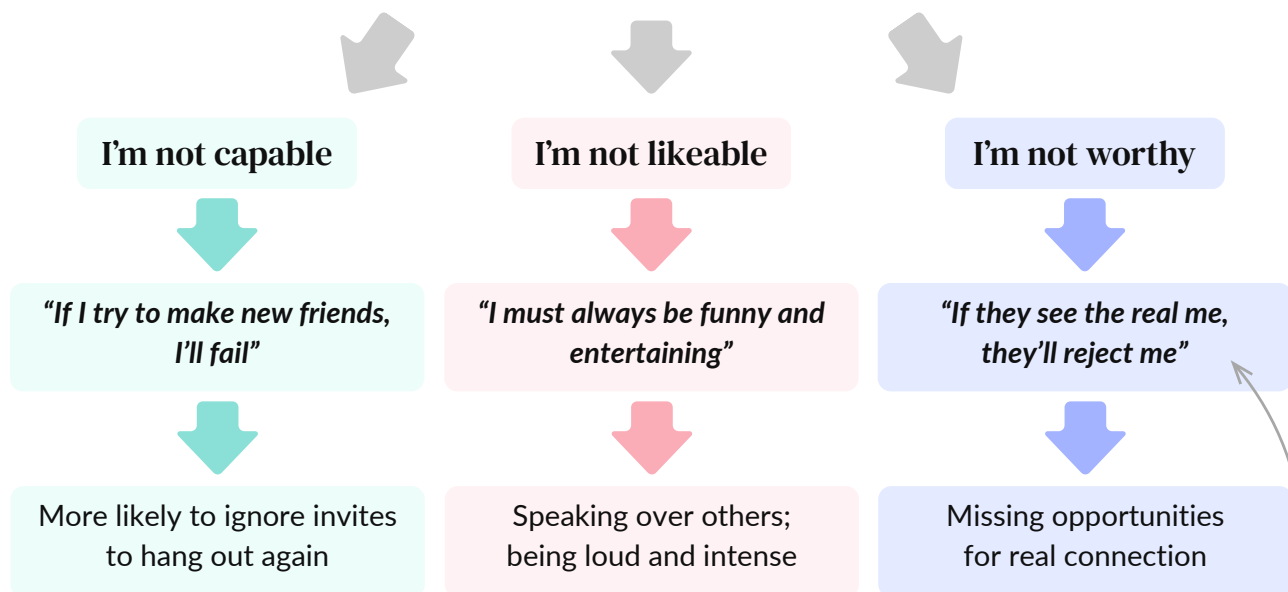
Negative Core Beliefs

2 Core beliefs make “rules” for our behavior

Core beliefs can also create “rules” or “assumptions” that affect how we behave. These statements often start with “I must,” “I should,” or “If I ____, then ____.” Rules and assumptions can develop as a result of difficult past experiences. For example, someone may have failed at making friends before, may have been told they are boring, or may have been bullied just for being themselves in the past. However, rules can be limiting, especially if situations change and the “rule” no longer applies.



Nervous about spending time with new friends



Like core beliefs, we might not be aware of the “rules” for our behavior that influence our actions

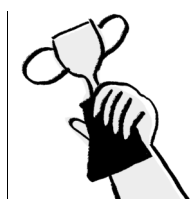
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Negative Core Beliefs

3 Core beliefs can create lasting habits

Core beliefs can also affect our patterns of behavior over time. Depending on the core belief, we might develop certain unhealthy habits, or compensatory strategies, that (seem to) keep us from the pain of wrestling with a negative core belief. If your core belief is that you are not capable, you might develop a habit of never trying new things - meaning you don't have to feel incapable as often. If your core belief is that you're not worthy, you might reject positive experiences - meaning you can avoid the guilty thoughts that you do not deserve good things, deep down.



- Situations involving performance and success, like work, school, making friends, trying new things, and learning new skills
- Situations testing confidence



I'm not capable



- Procrastination
- Perfectionism
- Over-preparing
- Avoiding new things



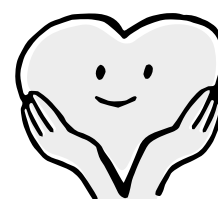
- Social situations like meeting new people, getting along with coworkers, friendships and relationships, and being included or excluded
- Situations testing self-esteem



I'm not likeable



- Seeking other people's approval
- Asking for reassurance
- Second-guessing social interactions



- Situations like offers of compliments, attention, love, care, opportunity, or equality
- Situations involving comparison to others
- Situations testing self-worth



I'm not worthy



- Avoiding or rejecting the positive
- Putting yourself down
- Comparing yourself negatively to others

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Negative Core Beliefs

Reflecting on the effects of your core beliefs

Did any of the examples above sound like your experience? If so, circle any relevant parts and explore the following questions. If not, or if you're unsure of how to answer the following questions, skip to the next page.

Which situations tend to bring out negative core beliefs for you?

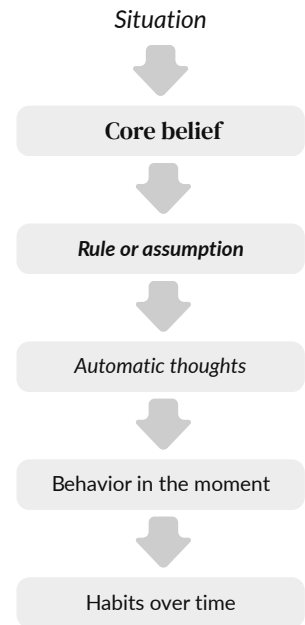
What is the negative core belief that most affects you?

Are there any rules or assumptions related to your negative core belief?

What automatic negative thoughts come up as a result of your negative core belief?

How does your negative core belief tend to affect your behavior in the moment?

Has your negative core belief resulted in any lasting habits over time?



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Negative Core Beliefs

Figuring out core beliefs and their effects

Ambiguous (or unclear) situations can help bring out core beliefs. When we're not sure how to interpret a situation, core beliefs can fill in the blanks for us with automatic thoughts.

Take a look at the list of ambiguous situations below, and notice your "knee-jerk" (automatic) thoughts or emotions as you read each one. Which one would bring up the most **intense, negative emotions** if it happened in real life?

- You text someone something important and they take a strangely long time to respond
- You walk past two coworkers who stop talking when you get close
- Your boss says, "We need to talk later," and walks away
- After you get home from work, your coworker texts you, "We've got a problem"
- Your friend is praised for their hard work planning a party, but no one mentions your hard work
- During a tough week at work, you see on social media that your friend just got promoted
- Your partner seems oddly quiet during dinner
- When doing a chore at home, your roommate tells you they know a better way to do it
- Your friend cancels plans at the last minute, saying that they're busy
- You share an idea in a meeting and someone immediately changes the topic
- Someone tells you, "You really made an impression at that party last night..."
- When waiting to hear back from a job interview, you receive an email titled "Position Decision"

For the situation you checked, what negative automatic thoughts first came to your mind?

Have similar negative automatic thoughts come up in difficult situations before? Which situations?

Do these situations have anything in common? (Like performance, first impressions, or comparison)

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Negative Core Beliefs

Does it ever feel like there are emotional “rules” for your behavior? These might sound like, “I can never make mistakes,” “I won’t be good enough if someone dislikes me,” or, “Other people are always more important.”

What does this rule say about your inner confidence (belief you are capable), self-esteem (belief you are likeable), or self-worth (belief you are as worthy as others)?

Changing core beliefs

Changing your negative core beliefs can be tough, but it’s totally possible! The first step is to determine what you would like your new core belief to be. These might sound like:

- I am capable
- I am strong
- I can do what I put my mind to
- I am likeable
- I am interesting
- I don’t need everyone’s approval to be okay
- I am good enough
- I am worth caring about
- I’m as worthy of love as everyone else

Write a new, positive core belief here:

Think about one of the situations above that strongly triggers your negative core belief. If you were in that same situation, but you **truly, 100%, confidently** believed your new positive core belief, what would you do differently? How would you feel? What would you think?

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Negative Core Beliefs

The fastest way to believe something new is to act as if it's already true

To change your core belief, make a concerted effort to [notice evidence that it is true](#) and [take action that is consistent with your new belief each day](#). We've provided some examples below.

Why does this work? Generally speaking, our negative core beliefs are *not true*. It is far more likely that someone is reasonably capable, likeable, or worthy than totally incapable, unlikeable, or unworthy. Those rigid negative core beliefs are often a result of anxiety, depression, stress, or trauma, rather than a reflection of reality. So there very likely *is* evidence the new belief is true.

Also, CBT teaches us that our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors all influence each other. This means that over time, changes in how we behave can result in changes in how we think and feel.

Date	What I noticed or did	How it relates to my new core belief
Example 1	Resisted urge to ask my friend if she was mad at me, just because she texted back late	Even if she is mad (unlikely), I can handle it
Example 2	Joined my friends for trivia night	It's okay if I make mistakes/get things wrong
Example 3	Spoke up and said I needed some time to myself	My needs are just as important as everyone else's

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Additional Resources to Support Your Mental Health Journey

It can be hard to know where to begin looking for support in your mental health journey. Getting a referral from a primary care physician is a reliable first step. Also, sometimes family and friends have experienced similar issues and have professionals they would recommend. The experts at ChoosingTherapy.com are here to help as well, with resources we have reviewed and recommend. Our [strict editorial standards](#) ensure our reviews are fair, honest, thorough, and based on firsthand experience.

You Can Trust ChoosingTherapy.com



325+
Companies Reviewed



3,625+
Hours of Firsthand Experience



1,545+
Data Points Analyzed



[Best Online Therapy](#)

Online therapy is a convenient way to connect with a licensed therapist to address mental health issues, reduce unhealthy behaviors, develop effective coping skills, and get more satisfaction out of life. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.

[Best Online Psychiatry](#)

Online psychiatry providers enable patients to consult with licensed psychiatrists and other mental health professionals. They can evaluate, diagnose, and prescribe medication to help manage mental health issues. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.



[Best Mental Health Apps](#)

Apps can be great way to monitor mood, track sleep, journal, and practice healthy coping skills like mindfulness and meditation. There are apps specifically designed to help people reduce the symptoms of depression, anxiety, ADHD, chronic stress, and burnout.

[Therapist Directory](#)

When you're looking for a mental health provider with a very particular skill set, level of experience, or personality type, a therapist directory can be very helpful. Using the filters, you can refine your search until you find a therapist who feels like a perfect fit.





Tools for Self-Assessment and Psychoeducation

Figuring out the next step in your mental health journey can be overwhelming. Developed by psychologists, the tools at [ChoosingTherapy.com](https://www.ChoosingTherapy.com) can help. Our mental health self-assessment quizzes can help you explore common symptoms of mental health concerns, as well as find the best therapy style for you. Our mental health worksheets can guide you through therapy concepts and how to use them in your life.

[Learn More with Mental Health Quizzes](#)

Our collection of psychologist-developed mental health quizzes can help you learn if you are experiencing mild, moderate, or concerning levels of anxiety, depression, stress, burnout, and more. Each quiz also provides targeted resources based on your answers. These self-assessments are designed to offer insight, not diagnoses, and can be a helpful first step in recognizing symptoms and deciding whether to seek further support. If you have concerns about your mental health or your quiz results, we recommend you reach out to a licensed mental health professional.



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