

Uncovering Core Beliefs

Both consciously and subconsciously, our brains are continuously being programmed by the words, opinions, and beliefs of our families, friends, authority figures, and the broader society in which we live. Some of this programming is desirable and good, but some programming is quite negative, having the effect of putting you down or making you feel less than you really are. This is a normal and natural part of growing up and learning to fit into society, but many of us incorporate these beliefs so deeply that we barely notice them. Known as "core beliefs," they are patterns of thinking with which we have become so identified that we rarely question them.

Some of these beliefs may be positive, such as a deep belief that we are worth being loved and that life is good. However, many people uncover negative core beliefs like, "I don't deserve to be happy," or "No one can be trusted," perhaps due to past mistreatment, or due to well-meaning but misguided elders and "betters." If deep down, you do not believe you deserve to be happy, you will probably sabotage the attempts of others, and even your own attempts, to foster more happiness in your life.

Take some time to ponder the questions below deeply. Sit with each one for a while. Ideally, you could work with just one question each day. Repeat the question to yourself all throughout the day, letting it percolate in the back of your mind. Watch what comes up for you, and write down your observations. Consider how each core belief impacts you or has impacted you in the past. Note how the same core belief may sometimes be helpful, and may sometimes be harmful. It might also be useful to come back and repeat this exercise once in a while, to see how your core beliefs shift over time.

SELF

Deep down, what do you believe about yourself?

What feelings come up with, or are attached to, these beliefs?

How have these beliefs affected you in the past?

How do these beliefs affect you now?

RELATIONSHIPS

Deep down, what do you believe about relationships with other people? Are people basically good or bad? Can people be trusted?

What feelings come up with, or are attached to, these beliefs?

How have these beliefs affected you in the past?

How do these beliefs affect you now?

WORLD

Deep down, what do you believe about the world? Is it a safe place? How connected do you feel to the environment and the greater universe around you?

What feelings come up with, or are attached to, these beliefs?

How have these beliefs affected you in the past?

How do these beliefs affect you now?

LIFE

Deep down, what do you believe about life? What do you believe constitutes "the good life"? Does life have meaning or purpose? How do you feel about determinism versus free will? What do you believe will happen when you die?

What feelings come up with, or are attached to, these beliefs?

How have these beliefs affected you in the past?

How do these beliefs affect you now?

OTHER CORE BELIEFS

What other deeply held beliefs do you hold?

What feelings come up with, or are attached to, these beliefs?

How have these beliefs affected you in the past?

How do these beliefs affect you now?



The point of this exercise is not necessarily to force yourself to think more positively, but simply to notice deeply ingrained patterns of thinking that might be affecting your experience of life. These beliefs were likely laid down over many years, so if you find some that you wish to change, remember that doing so may take some patient reprogramming.