

Overcoming unhelpful thoughts and beliefs

Thoughts and disordered eating patterns

Throughout this program, you may have noticed that we've repeatedly asked you to identify your thoughts and mental images. This is because our thought patterns can influence our feelings and behaviours, and vice versa. We might change our eating and other behaviours based on our thoughts.

In this session, we aim to delve deeper into automatic thinking. Additionally, we seek to understand the core beliefs that underlie this thinking. Core beliefs are fundamental to how we perceive ourselves, others, and the world. Identifying these beliefs can be enlightening, as they can shed light on how they impact your disordered eating. Sometimes, these beliefs may lead us to think and act in ways that differ from our true selves

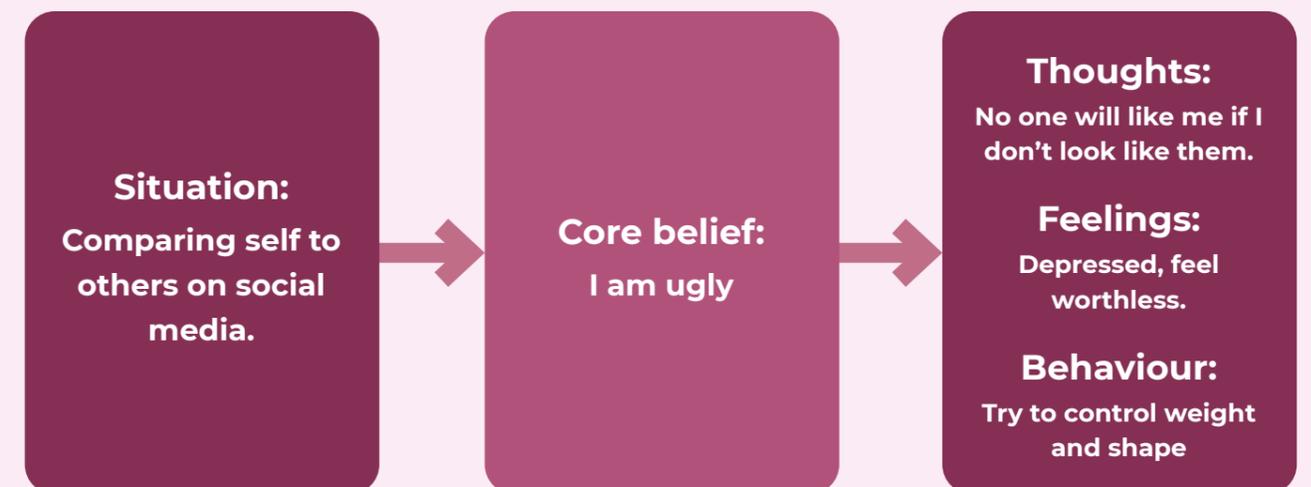
Core beliefs often develop from our life experiences and the situations we've encountered. They can become reinforced over time. To help understand these beliefs, it can be valuable to reflect on key ages or periods in your life when you believe your disordered eating behaviours began.



Core beliefs and disordered eating

As mentioned earlier, various life experiences can significantly influence the way we treat ourselves and our bodies. Over time, these experiences can shape the way we think and feel about ourselves. Frequently encountering specific situations and topics can lead to the development and activation of unhelpful core beliefs that are closely tied to our self-perception and emotional well-being.

It's crucial to recognize and address these unhelpful core beliefs, as they often contribute to keeping individuals trapped in a cycle



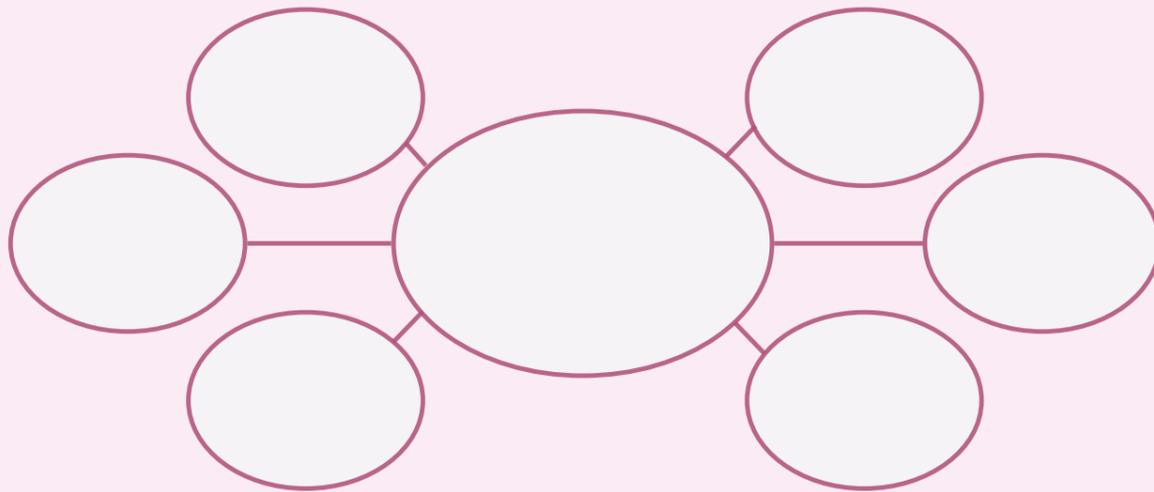
We recognize that when our 'hot button' is pressed, our brain often becomes entangled in self-criticism, self-hate, and feelings of shame. It's important to understand that our brain's functioning, neurobiology, human nature, and life experiences all shape the way our minds operate. It's not our fault that we think and feel this way. Simply put, we're doing the best we can, given the way our brain functions.

The exercises in the next section will help you identify these thoughts. The first step toward self-compassion and self-acceptance is gaining an understanding of your 'hot thoughts.'

Uncovering core beliefs

There are various methods to uncover core beliefs. One helpful approach is to revisit your emotional food diary or previous behavioural experiments. Are there any recurring themes in your thoughts? What do you say to yourself when experiencing emotional distress?

Use the exercise below to help identify core beliefs that you've uncovered through previous activities



Use the exercise below to help continue to examine and uncover your core beliefs. Highlight any that you may recognise below:

- I am worthless
- I am not good enough
- I am helpless
- I need to be perfect
- The world will not accept me
- I am inadequate
- People will hate and reject me
- I am disgusting

Beliefs about myself: (these usually begin with "I am")

.....

Beliefs about others/the world: (these usually begin with "others are")

.....

Challenging unhelpful beliefs

Core beliefs are often deeply ingrained, and over time, you may have gathered evidence that seems to confirm their validity. This accumulation of evidence can make it challenging to pay attention to information that suggests your belief is not entirely accurate.

In the last session, you've already begun the process of challenging your thoughts, rules, and assumptions about food. It's equally important to confront those deeply ingrained beliefs. To do this, we will create a positive data log, which allows us to document evidence that challenges these beliefs.

STEP 1: Select one of your negative core beliefs to examine.

STEP 2: Ask yourself about what experiences do you have to show that the belief is not completely true all of the time.

STEP 3: Log evidence over a long period of time to challenge this belief.

STEP 4: Once you have at least 10 pieces of evidence, use that to create a more balanced and alternative belief.

Core belief to be challenged:

e.g. I am not good enough

Strength of belief (0 = completely untrue - 10 = completely true)

Before challenging: 10 After Challenging: 4

Experiences from the last 2 weeks that show that this belief is not COMPLETELY true ALL the time:

1. I am captain of my netball team
2. Mum tells me all the time how proud she is of me
3. I've been in a relationship for the past year, my girlfriend Bonnie tells me she loves me
4. In the last 2 weeks I have kept up with cleaning the house and doing the washing
5. I passed my driver's licence test
6. I was invited to join my netball club's student tour as a volunteer helper
7. I gave my spare change to someone sleeping outside the shops
8. I offered to drive my friend home the other day so she didn't have to take the bus in the rain
9. My friend asked me to go out for coffee
10. I completed a difficult task at work

When you have considered all the experiences you have written down, develop an alternative balanced core belief. Write this down

Balanced Core Belief

I have had a lot of different experiences that suggest I am actually good enough

Strength of belief: 6
(0 = completely untrue
10 = completely true)

Noticing unhelpful thoughts

Unhelpful beliefs can give rise to various unhelpful thoughts and thinking styles, as demonstrated in the exercises above. These thoughts may be distorted, inaccurate, or exaggerated and often serve to perpetuate our unhelpful beliefs. Recognizing and diffusing these thoughts, while remembering that it's your brain generating them, can contribute significantly to your goal of accepting and understanding these beliefs.

Examples:

Thinking Style	What it might look like:
Should's...	I should not eat this cake because it's bad
All or nothing (Black & White)	I haven't eaten well today so I might as well just not eat tomorrow
Overgeneralization	Everybody is on a diet
Catastrophizing	If I weighed x then people wouldn't like me

Defusion Techniques

NAMING THE THOUGHT

When you're grappling with an upsetting thought, try using the phrase "I am having the thought..." This can help create a mental distance between you and the thought.

RELEASING STATEMENT

While affirmations may feel uncomfortable for some, consider practicing self-forgiveness exercises. When you notice an unhelpful thought, flip it around and release yourself from the emotion. For example, you might say, "It's okay that I'm feeling shameful; that's just my brain"

Top ten tips for overcoming thoughts & beliefs

1. Understand how early experiences have influenced beliefs.
2. Be aware of your core beliefs and how they influence your thoughts, feelings and behaviours.
3. Examine your patterns of behaviour, which are belief and thought driven?
4. Challenge unhelpful beliefs using a positive data log.
5. Discover your beliefs and thoughts by keeping records and using the above exercises.
6. Use cognitive defusion techniques.
7. Notice your thinking styles.
8. Undertake actions to strengthen your new cognitive beliefs.
9. Identify any barriers or challenges which may get in your way.
10. Revisit last week's session to understand any rules you may have created.

Meal Structure & Review

Week Start M T W T F S S

Meal 1

Meal 2

Meal 3

Snack 1

Snack 2

Other Eating Episodes

What went well?

Challenges:

My positive quote:

Goal of the week:

Emotional Food Diary

Example Food Diary						
When? Date/Time	Who were you with? What were you doing?	What did you eat?	Triggers identified	Thoughts/feelings prior to eating	B/L/P	Thoughts after event?

My Week in Review

What went well with my eating behaviours this week:

Any behaviours which need my attention:

What I will focus on next week:



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