
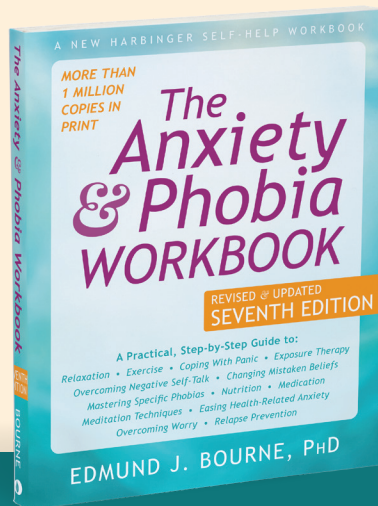


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Helping Clients Work with Mistaken Beliefs



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In most cases, it's possible to trace negative thinking back to deeper-lying beliefs or assumptions clients hold about themselves, others, and life in general. These basic assumptions have been variously called "scripts," "core beliefs," "life decisions," "fallacious beliefs," or "mistaken beliefs." We learn these from our parents, teachers, and peers while growing up, as well as from the larger society around us. These beliefs are typically so basic to our thinking that we do not recognize them as *beliefs* at all—we just take them for granted and assume them to reflect reality; they become part of our "attitude" or "outlook." Examples of mistaken beliefs clients might hold are "I'm powerless," "Life is a struggle," or "I should always look good and act nice, no matter how I feel."

Mistaken beliefs are at the root of much of the anxiety clients experience. They may talk themselves into much of their anxiety by anticipating the worst (what-if thinking), putting themselves down (self-critical thinking), and pushing themselves to meet unreasonable demands and expectations (perfectionist thinking). Underlying these destructive patterns of self-talk are some basic false assumptions about themselves and "the way life is."

A client could save themselves quite a bit of worrying, for example, if they let go of the basic assumption, "I must worry about a problem before there's any chance it will go away." Similarly, they would feel more confident and secure if they discarded the mistaken belief "I'm a failure unless I succeed" or "I'm nothing unless others love and approve of me." Life would be less stressful and tense if they could let go of the belief "I must do it perfectly or it's not worth bothering to try." Ultimately, clients can go a long way toward creating a less anxious way of life by working on changing the basic assumptions that tend to perpetuate their anxiety.

Mistaken beliefs often keep clients from achieving their most important goals in life. To help a client address their mistaken beliefs, you might guide them to consider the questions, "What is it that I really want out of life? What would I attempt to do if I knew I could not fail?" Have clients really consider these questions in-depth.

If they don't yet have what they want, ask them to consider the simple question, "Why not?"

In the process of considering these questions, clients may have discovered certain beliefs or assumptions that have been holding them back. From there, you can guide them to consider: are these assumptions truly valid?

Examples of assumptions that clients hold themselves back with might include "I can't afford to have what I want," "I don't have the time to go back to school and study the subject that interests me," or "I don't have the talent to succeed." At a more unconscious level, they might even feel "I don't deserve to have what I truly want." None of these ideas necessarily reflect the true nature of reality; they all involve assumptions that might well turn out to be false if actually tested. Often clients don't realize how such assumptions are affecting their behavior until someone else—like a therapist—points it out to them.

Mistaken beliefs often set limits on clients' self-esteem and self-worth. Many such beliefs involve the idea that their self-worth depends on something outside themselves, such as social status, wealth, material possessions, the love of another person, or social approval in general. If clients don't have these things, somehow they believe that they are not worth much. Crucially, the belief that "Success is everything" or "My worth depends on what I accomplish" places the basis of a person's self-esteem outside of them. So does the belief "I'm nothing unless I'm loved (or approved of)."

The truth that takes some people a long time to realize is that self-worth is *inherent*. We all have an essential value, worth, and dignity just by virtue of the fact that we're human beings. Your clients will have many qualities and talents, regardless of their outer accomplishments or the approval of others, and it's essential that you guide clients to understand this.

You might remind them that we respect the inherent value of dogs and cats, for instance, as animals, and we do so without thinking. So, too, do human beings have inherent value *just as they are*, apart from what they accomplish, what they possess, or whose approval they enjoy. As clients grow in self-esteem, they can *learn* to respect and believe in themselves apart from what they've accomplished and without relying on others for their good feelings (or making others reliant on them).

Helping Clients Uncover Their Mistaken Beliefs

There are innumerable mistaken beliefs. Your clients will have their own collections of mistaken beliefs as a result of what they'll have learned from parents, teachers, and peers during childhood and adolescence. Sometimes clients will take on certain false beliefs directly from parents or caregivers, such as when they are told, "Big boys don't cry" or "Nice girls don't get angry." At other times, clients will develop certain attitudes about themselves as a result of being frequently criticized (thus "I'm worthless"), ignored (thus "My needs don't matter"), or rejected (thus "I'm unlovable") over many years. The unfortunate thing is that clients may live out these mistaken attitudes to the point where they act in ways—and get others to treat them in ways—that confirm them. Like computers, people can be "preprogrammed," and the mistaken beliefs of childhood can become self-fulfilling prophecies.

To help clients address their mistaken beliefs, work with them to develop counterstatements that replace the negative beliefs with positive ones. Positive statements that can be used to counter mistaken beliefs are often known as *affirmations*.

Below are some examples of fairly common mistaken beliefs that tend to influence many people, followed by counterstatements that replace the negative belief with a positive one.

- I'm powerless. I'm a victim of outside circumstances.

I'm responsible and in control of my life. Circumstances are what they are, but I can determine my attitude toward them.

- Life is a struggle. Something must be wrong if life seems too easy, pleasurable, or fun.

Life is full and pleasurable. It's okay for me to relax and have fun. Life is an adventure—and I'm learning to accept both the ups and the downs.

- If I take a risk, I'll fail. If I fail, others will reject me.

It's okay for me to take risks. It's okay to fail—I can learn a lot from every mistake. It's okay for me to be a success.

- I'm unimportant. My feelings and needs are unimportant.

I am a valuable and unique person. I deserve to have my feelings and needs taken care of as much as anyone else.

- I always should look good and act nice, no matter how I feel.

It's okay simply to be myself.

- If I worry enough, this problem should get better or go away.

Worrying has no effect on solving problems; taking action does.

- I can't cope with difficult or scary situations.

I can learn to handle any scary situation if I approach it slowly, in small enough steps.

- The outside world is dangerous. There is safety only in what is known and familiar.

I can learn to become more comfortable with the world outside. I look forward to new opportunities for learning and growth that the outside world can offer.

Guiding clients to just *recognize* their own particular mistaken beliefs will serve as the first and most important step toward letting go of them. The second step is to help them develop a positive affirmation to counter each mistaken belief, which they'll continue to impress on their minds until they are "deprogrammed."

To help clients identify some of their own mistaken beliefs, you might guide them to complete the following questionnaire. Instruct clients to rate each statement on a 1 to 4 scale, according to how much they think it influences their feelings and behavior. Then ask them to check off the beliefs they rated 3 or 4.

Mistaken Beliefs Questionnaire

How much does each of these unconstructive beliefs influence your feelings and behavior? Take your time to reflect about each belief.

1 = Not at all 2 = Somewhat/sometimes 3 = Strongly/frequently 4 = Very strongly

Place the appropriate number after each statement:

1. I feel powerless or helpless.
2. Often I feel like a victim of outside circumstances.
3. I don't have the money to do what I really want.
4. There is seldom enough time to do what I want.
5. Life is very difficult—it's a struggle.
6. If things are going well, watch out!
7. I feel unworthy. I feel that I'm not good enough.
8. Often I feel that I don't deserve to be successful or happy.
9. Often I feel a sense of defeat and resignation, a sense of "Why bother?"
10. My condition seems hopeless.
11. There is something fundamentally wrong with me.
12. I feel ashamed of my condition.
13. If I take risks to get better, I'm afraid I'll fail.
14. If I take risks to get better, I'm afraid I'll succeed.
15. If I recover fully, I might have to deal with realities I'd rather not face.
16. I feel like I'm nothing (or can't make it) unless I'm loved.
17. I can't stand being separated from others.
18. If a person I love doesn't love me in return, I feel like it's my fault.
19. It's very hard to be alone.
20. What others think of me is very important.
21. I feel personally threatened when criticized.
22. It's important to please others.
23. People won't like me if they see who I really am.
24. I need to keep up a front or others will see my weaknesses.
25. I have to achieve or produce something significant in order to feel okay about myself.

26. My accomplishments at work/school are extremely important.
27. Success is everything.
28. I have to be the best at what I do.
29. I have to be somebody—somebody outstanding.
30. To fail is terrible.
31. I can't rely on others for help.
32. I can't receive from others.
33. If I let someone get too close, I'm afraid of being controlled.
34. I can't tolerate being out of control.
35. I'm the only one who can solve my problems.
36. I should always be very generous and unselfish.
37. I should be the *perfect*... (Rate each below.)
- employee
 - professional
 - spouse
 - parent
 - lover
 - friend
 - student
 - son/daughter
38. I should be able to endure any hardship.
39. I should be able to find a quick solution to every problem.
40. I should never be tired or fatigued.
41. I should always be efficient.
42. I should always be competent.
43. I should always be able to foresee everything.
44. I should never be angry or irritable. Or, I don't like (or am afraid of) anger.
45. I should always be pleasant or nice, no matter how I feel.
46. I often feel... (Rate each below.)
- ugly
 - inferior or defective
 - unintelligent
 - guilty or ashamed
47. I'm just the way I am—I can't really change.
48. The world outside is a dangerous place.
49. Unless you worry about a problem, it just gets worse.
50. It's risky to trust people.

51. My problems will go away on their own with time.
52. I feel anxious about making mistakes.
53. I demand perfection of myself.
54. If I didn't have my safe person (or safe place), I'm afraid I couldn't cope.
55. If I stop worrying, I'm afraid something bad will happen.
56. I'm afraid to face the world out there on my own.
57. My self-worth isn't a given—it has to be earned.

You may have noticed that some of the beliefs on the questionnaire fall into specific groups, each of which reflects a very basic belief or attitude toward life (as developed by David Burns in his landmark book *Feeling Good*). Work with your clients to evaluate their answers and see how they scored with respect to each of the groups of beliefs listed below. If their total score on the items in a particular subgroup exceeds the criterion value, then this is likely to be a problem for them. It's important that you and the client give these subgroups special attention as you begin to help them work with affirmations to start changing their mistaken beliefs.

| | |
|--|---|
| If the client's total score for questions 1, 2, 7, 9, 10, 11 is over 15: | The client likely believes that they are powerless, have little or no control over outside circumstances, or are unable to do much that could help their situation. In sum, "I'm powerless" or "I can't do much about my life." |
| If the client's total score for questions 16, 17, 18, 19, 54, 56 is over 15: | The client likely believes that their self-worth is dependent on the love of someone else. They feel that they need another's (or others') love to feel okay about themselves and to cope. In sum, "My worth and security are dependent on being loved." |
| If the client's total score for questions 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 45 is over 15: | The client likely believes that their self-worth is dependent on others' approval. Being pleasing and getting acceptance from others is very important for their sense of security and their sense of who they are. In sum, "My worth and security depend on the approval of others." |
| If the client's total score for questions 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 41, 42 is over 20: | The client likely believes that their self-worth is dependent on external achievements, such as school or career performance, status, or wealth. In sum, "My worth is dependent on my performance or achievements." |
| If the client's total score for questions 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 50 is over 15: | The client likely believes that they can't trust, rely on, or receive help from others. They may have a tendency to keep a distance from people and avoid intimacy for fear of losing control. In sum, "If I trust or get too close, I'll lose control." |
| If the client's total score for questions 37, 38, 39, 40, 52, 53 is over 25: | The client likely believes that they have to be perfect in some or many areas of life. They make excessive demands on themselves. There is no room for mistakes. In sum, "I have to be perfect" or "It's not okay to make mistakes." |

Countering Mistaken Beliefs

Now that you have an idea of those mistaken beliefs that have the greatest impact on your client, how do you go about helping them change those beliefs? The first step is for clients to consider this question: *How strongly do I believe in them?* There are three possible ways for clients to view mistaken beliefs:

- The client doesn't really believe it. The belief is simply a conditioned habit that they are ready to give up. They recognize the uselessness of the belief *and* they realize that it has no strong emotional hold on them. If that is the case, the client is ready to develop a positive affirmation to counter the belief. You can proceed directly to the section "Guidelines for Constructing Affirmations" and follow the suggested steps for developing affirmations to counter a particular belief.
- The client doesn't really subscribe to the belief on an intellectual level, but it still has an emotional grip on them and influences the way they act. They *don't want to believe* that "it's always important to be pleasing to others," for example, but they find that they continue to feel and act as if this were true. It's hard for them "get the belief out of their system." If that is the case, it's important to subject the belief to questions 5 and 6 in the item that follows, "Six Questions for Challenging Mistaken Beliefs." Guide the client to identify any belief they rated 3 or 4 that still affects them despite their intellectual doubts. Then they can use questions 5 and 6 to examine whether the belief is beneficial to their well-being and whether it developed out of their own choice or from their family or other history.
- The client may really have faith in a particular belief. They're not convinced that it's inaccurate; they'll need some persuading before they'll consider giving it up. The idea of substituting a positive affirmation in place of an attitude they've long believed in seems superficial or naively optimistic. If that is the case, it's important for the client to subject the belief to questions 1, 2, and 3 under "Six Questions for Challenging Mistaken Beliefs" included in this resource. These first three questions are especially useful for challenging a mistaken belief on a strictly logical level. If the client can discredit their belief on purely rational grounds, then you can proceed to questions 4, 5, and 6, which will enable them to see how the belief affects their personal well-being and to determine whether it's their own belief or was acquired—perhaps from your parents or caregivers, or in some other way.

Six Questions for Challenging Mistaken Beliefs

1. What is the evidence for this belief? Looking objectively at all of your life experience, what is the evidence that this is true?
2. Does this belief *invariably* or *always* hold true for you?
3. Does this belief look at the whole picture? Does it take into account both positive and negative ramifications?
4. Is this belief consistent with your personal values—what gives your life the greatest meaning?
5. Does this belief promote your well-being and/or peace of mind?
6. Did you choose this belief on your own or did it develop out of your experience of growing up in your family?

A few words need to be said about the last of the six questions. Many of your clients' mistaken beliefs were likely acquired from their family while they were growing up. There are at least two ways this could happen. First, one or both of a client's parents may have held the belief and they simply learned it from them. For example, beliefs such as "The world outside is a dangerous place" or "It's risky to trust people" might have been attitudes held by their parents that clients adopted wholesale, because no alternative views were presented to them.

The other way a client might have acquired a mistaken belief is as a *reaction to what happened* and/or *the way they were treated* as a child. For example, if a client's father passed away and then their mother went to work when they were five years old, they may have felt abandoned and developed the belief that "Being alone means being abandoned and unloved." Or if a client's parents expected them to achieve and criticized their mistakes and performance at school, they might develop such beliefs as "My accomplishments are extremely important" and "It's not okay to make mistakes."

It's often helpful in the process of evaluating mistaken beliefs to see how they arose from unfortunate or dysfunctional circumstances a client experienced during childhood; to work with your clients to investigate the connections between their childhoods and the mistaken beliefs they hold now. It's also important that clients understand that while such beliefs may have helped them survive as children, *they have long lost their usefulness and only serve to create anxiety or stress now.*

What Challenging A Client's Negative Beliefs Might Look Like

The following examples illustrate the application of the above questions in challenging mistaken beliefs.

| | | |
|--------------------------|---|--|
| Mistaken Belief: | “I am powerless or helpless.” (Note: When challenging beliefs from the <i>Mistaken Beliefs Questionnaire</i> , have clients reword any belief beginning with the words “I feel...” to “I am...” This provides a more direct statement of the belief.) | |
| <i>Questioning:</i> | 1. | “What is the evidence for this?” |
| | 2. | “Is this always true for me?” |
| | 3. | “Does this belief promote my well-being?” |
| <i>Counterarguments:</i> | 1. | “What is the evidence for this?” “Though I often feel powerless or helpless, that doesn’t necessarily mean that I am powerless or helpless. After all, I can work on mastering strategies to work with my anxiety, and I’ve consulted a therapist specializing in anxiety disorders to help me overcome my condition. Also, I have the support of my family and friends who are backing me all the way. Thus, there is no strong evidence that I’m either powerless or helpless.” |
| | 2. | “Is this always true for me?” “Some days I certainly feel powerless or helpless, but other days I feel more capable and optimistic. It’s just not true that I always feel that way.” |
| | 3. | “Does this belief promote my well-being?” “Believing that I’m powerless and helpless is destructive to developing confidence in myself and hope for recovery. Such a belief definitely does not promote my well-being or peace of mind.” |
| <i>Affirmations:</i> | <i>I believe in myself.</i> <i>I trust I have the capacity to overcome my problem with anxiety.</i> | |

Mistaken Belief:

“It’s very important to please others.”

Questioning:

1. “Is this always true for me?”
2. “Does this belief promote my well-being?”
3. “Did I choose this belief on my own, or did it develop from my childhood?”

Counterarguments:

1. “Is this always true for me?”
“Certainly there are some situations where it’s helpful to come across in a pleasing manner. If I’m interviewing for a job, going out on a first date, comforting my friend, or hosting a party, I generally want to be pleasing. On the other hand, if I’m feeling exhausted or upset and need support from my partner or friends, it serves me better to ask them to be there for me rather than to have to deny my needs and keep up a pleasing front. In short, it’s sometimes more important to attend to my own feelings.”
2. “Does this belief promote my well-being?”
“In some situations, probably yes. I feel good about myself if I can be pleasant in situations where to come across as such might be appropriate. However, it doesn’t serve me to try to be pleasing when I’m actually feeling upset or ill. I’ll be more honest and in tune with myself to let people know what I’m feeling and ask for their support.”
3. “Did I choose this belief on my own, or did it develop from my childhood?”
“My mother was ill and frequently complained during much of my childhood. I felt I always had to be on guard to protect her from my own problems. It seemed that I had to be pleasing to maintain her approval. No wonder I grew up to be such a people pleaser! I guess that I didn’t freely choose this belief, but rather it was imposed on me by the circumstances of my childhood.”

Affirmations:

It’s okay to not always be pleasing.

I can enjoy being pleasing at those times when I genuinely feel like it.

Mistaken Belief:

“My accomplishments at work/school are very important.”

Questioning:

1. “Is this belief always true?”
2. “Does this belief look at the whole picture?”
3. “Does this belief promote my well-being?”
4. “Did I choose this belief on my own, or did it develop from my childhood?”

Counterarguments:

1. “Is this belief always true?”
“No, in as much as other areas of my life (health, relationships, leisure time, creative pursuits) are also important. Accomplishing things at school or work is certainly important, but it’s not always important twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.”
2. “Does this belief look at the whole picture?”
“It’s true that what I accomplish at school or work is important. I need to maintain a certain level of competence in school in order to earn the degree that will help me find a job.” (Or “I need to maintain a certain level of performance at work to hold my job.”)
“But is it looking at the whole picture to regard my accomplishments as supremely important? If that were the case, they would be more important than my health, my peace of mind, my family, and everything else I value. Such an attitude would lead to an imbalanced and ultimately unhealthy lifestyle—a lifestyle where nothing else mattered except my success and accomplishments. Thus it’s unreasonable to believe that my accomplishments are supremely important.”
3. “Does this belief promote my well-being?”
“For reasons already mentioned, I recognize that an exclusive focus on accomplishments is unhealthy.”
4. “Did I choose this belief on my own, or did it develop from my childhood?”
“My parents were both professionals who were successful in their careers and expected me to follow their example. I always had to do well in school to receive their approval and was criticized for any grade below an A. My attitude that achievement is so important came in large part from living with them—I didn’t freely choose it.”

Affirmations:

My accomplishments are important and so are other things in my life.

I am learning how to balance work and play in my life.

Guidelines for Constructing Affirmations

Here are some guidelines to help clients construct useful and effective affirmations.

- An affirmation should be *short, simple, direct*, and usually in the *first person*. That is, “I believe in myself” is preferable to “There are a lot of good qualities I have that I believe in.”
- Guide clients to keep affirmations in the *present tense* (“I am prosperous”) or *present progressive tense* (“I am becoming prosperous”). If clients tell themselves that some change they desire will happen in the future (“I will be prosperous”), that always keeps it one step removed.
- Guide clients to *avoid negatives*. For instance, instead of saying, “I’m no longer afraid of public speaking,” they might say, “I’m free of fear about public speaking” or “I’m becoming fearless about public speaking.” Similarly, instead of the negative statement “I’m not perfect,” try “It’s okay to be less than perfect” or “It’s okay to make mistakes.” Ultimately, our unconscious minds are incapable of making the distinction between a positive and a negative statement. They can turn a negative statement, such as “I’m not afraid,” into a positive statement that you don’t want to affirm—that is, “I’m afraid.”
- Guide clients to start with a direct *declaration* of a positive change they want to make in their lives (“I am making more time for myself every day”). If this feels a little too strong for a client just yet, they might change it to “I am willing to make more time for myself”; ultimately, *willingness* to change is the first step one needs to take in order to actually make any substantial change in life. A second alternative to a direct declaration is for a client to affirm that they are *becoming* something or *learning* to do something. If a client is not quite ready for a direct statement, such as “I’m strong, confident, and secure,” they can affirm, “I am becoming strong, confident, and secure.” Or, if a client is not quite ready for “I face my fears willingly,” they can try “I’m learning to face my fears.”
- It’s important that the client have *some* belief in—or at least a willingness to believe in—their affirmations. It’s by no means necessary, however, for them to believe in an affirmation 100 percent when they first start out. The whole point is for them to shift their beliefs and attitudes in favor of the affirmation. Be sure clients know this as they begin to work with their affirmations.

Ways to Work with Affirmations

Once you and your client have made a list of affirmations, have them decide on a few that they would like to work with. In general, it’s a good idea to work on only two or three at a time (unless a client chooses to make a recording, for instance, that contains all of them). This section covers some of the more helpful ways clients can utilize affirmations.

- Clients can *write an affirmation repetitively*, about five or ten times every day, for a week or two. Each time the client comes to doubt their belief in the affirmation, guide them to write their doubt down on the reverse side of the paper. As a client continues to write an affirmation over and over, and gives themselves the opportunity to express any doubts—and counter them—they’ll find that their willingness to believe the affirmation will increase. Here is an example:

Affirmation

“I’m learning to be fine by myself.”

“I’m learning to be fine by myself.”

“I’m learning to be fine by myself.”

“I’m learning to be fine by myself.”

Doubt

“Yes, for a few hours, but how will I ever manage for a whole day?”

“What if I panic and no one is around?”

“I’m not sure I’ll be able to do this.”

|

- Later, have the client go back and counter their doubts one by one with positive statements. In the example above, the three doubts might be countered by the following three affirmations:

“Gradually, I can learn to extend the time I’m okay being alone to an entire day.”

“If I panic while I’m alone, I can do abdominal breathing, go with the feeling, or call _____.”

“If I break this down into small enough steps, I know I can do it.”

- *Have the client write their affirmation in giant letters* with a magic marker on a blank sheet of paper (the words should be visible from at least twenty feet away). Then, ask them to attach the sheet to their bathroom mirror, their refrigerator, or some other conspicuous place in their home. Constantly seeing the affirmation day in and day out, whether or not they actively attend to it, will help to reinforce it in their mind.
- *Have the client record a series of affirmations.* If a client develops twenty or so affirmations to counter statements on the Mistaken Beliefs Questionnaire, they may wish to put them all on a recording. Note that affirmations are best done in the first person because they are direct declarations about personal beliefs, attitudes, or actions that a person intends to do. Also, be sure that clients allow five to ten seconds between each successive affirmation, when recording them, so that each has time to sink in. For clients to listen to the recording once a day for two or three weeks can lead to a major shift in their thinking and the way they feel about themselves. Let clients know it’s okay to for them play the recording at any time, even while cleaning the house or taking a shower. However, they can expedite the process by giving the recording their full attention in a very relaxed state when they’ve slowed themselves down enough to deeply feel each affirmation.
- *You can also encourage clients to take a single affirmation with them into meditation.* For clients to repeat an affirmation slowly and with conviction while in a deep meditative state is a very powerful way for them to incorporate it into their consciousness. Meditation is a state in which one can experience themselves as a “whole being.” Whatever a client affirms or declares with their whole being will have the strongest tendency to come true.

Increasing the Power of an Affirmation

There are two fundamental ways for clients to reinforce an affirmation or any new habit of thinking—*repetition* and *feeling*.

Repetition. It took repetition for clients to “program” mistaken beliefs in their minds originally. For instance, being told numerous times by their parents to “shut up” or “behave yourself” will have reinforced a client’s fallacious belief

that “I’m unworthy” or “I’m unimportant.” By the same token, repeated exposure to a positive affirmation can help instill that belief in a client’s mind until it replaces the original, false belief.

Feeling. Saying affirmations with deep conviction and feeling is the *most* powerful method, in my opinion, for strengthening them. For clients to get a new belief *into their hearts*—as well as into their heads—will give it the greatest power and efficacy. A good way to do this is for them to attain a state of relaxation first (through progressive muscle relaxation or meditation) and then to say the affirmation slowly, with feeling and a sense of conviction. It has been said before that what you believe in with your whole heart becomes a part of you.

Active Integration

Clients can also increase their conviction about an affirmation by keeping track of confirmations of it in real life. You might guide your clients to select an affirmation they wish to work on and write it down on a note card. As they go through the day, they’ll write down on the other side of the card any event or situation, no matter how minor, that supports the affirmation. Guide clients to keep this up for two more or weeks and see if they can compile a list of confirmations. For example, if a client is working with the affirmation “I can recover by taking small risks at my own pace,” then they might list all of their successes in reducing their anxiety or confronting phobic situations. Or if a client is working with the statement “I’m learning that there is more to life than success in my career (or in school),” they can list all the occasions when they derived enjoyment from other activities to demonstrate the truth of their new belief.

Reinforcing an affirmation by noting real-life events that confirm it will go a long way toward strengthening a client’s conviction of the affirmation’s truth.

Examples of Affirmations

Below are examples of affirmations clients can use to counter statements from the *Mistaken Beliefs Questionnaire*. Each numbered affirmation in this list corresponds to the same numbered mistaken belief in the *Mistaken Beliefs Questionnaire*. You can have your clients use any that feel right to them, or use these examples as guidelines in helping them make up their own.

Example Affirmations

1. I'm responsible and in control of my life.
2. Circumstances are what they are, but I can choose my attitude toward them.
3. I am becoming prosperous. I am creating the financial resources I need.
4. I am setting priorities and making time for what is important.
5. Life has its challenges and its satisfactions—I enjoy the adventure of life. Every challenge that comes along is an opportunity to learn and grow.
6. I accept the natural ups and downs of life.
7. I love and accept myself the way I am.
8. I deserve the good things in life as much as anyone else.
9. I am open to discovering new meaning in my life.
10. It's never too late to change. I am improving one step at a time.
11. I am innately healthy, strong, and capable of fully recovering. I am getting better every day.
12. I am committed to overcoming my condition. I am working on recovering from my condition.
13. I can recover by taking small risks at my own pace.
14. I am looking forward to the new freedom and opportunities I'll have when I've fully recovered.
15. Same as example 14.
16. I am learning to love myself.
17. I am learning to be comfortable by myself.
18. If someone doesn't return my love, I let it go and move on.
19. I am learning to be at peace with myself when alone. I am learning how to enjoy myself when alone.
20. I respect and believe in myself apart from others' opinions.
21. I can accept and learn from constructive criticism.
22. I'm learning to be myself around others. It's important to take care of my own needs.
23. It's okay to be myself around others. I'm willing to be myself around others.
24. Same as example 23.
25. I appreciate my achievements, and I'm much more than all of them put together.
26. I am learning how to balance work and play in my life.
27. I am learning that there is more to life than success. The greatest success is living well.
28. I'm a unique and capable person just as I am. I am satisfied doing the best I can.

29. Same as example 28.
30. It's okay to make mistakes. I'm willing to accept my mistakes and learn from them.
31. I'm willing to allow others to help me. I acknowledge my need for other people.
32. I am open to receiving support from others.
33. I am willing to take the risk of getting close to someone.
34. I am learning to relax and let go. I'm learning to accept those things I can't control.
35. I am willing to let others assist me in solving my problems.
36. When I love and care for myself, I am best able to be generous to others.
37. I'm doing the best I can as a [[insert short blank]]. (*Optional: I'm learning new ways to improve.*)
38. It's okay to be upset when things go wrong.
39. I'm okay if I don't always have a quick answer to every problem.
40. It's okay to make time to rest and relax.
41. I'm doing the best I can, and I'm satisfied with that.
42. Same as example 41.
43. It's okay if I'm unable to always foresee everything.
44. It's okay to be angry sometimes. I am learning to accept and express my angry feelings appropriately.
45. I'm learning to be honest with others, even when I'm not feeling pleasant or nice.
46. I believe that I am an attractive, intelligent, and valuable person. I am learning to let go of guilt.
47. I believe that I can change. I am willing to change (or grow).
48. The world outside is a place to grow and have fun.
49. Worrying about a problem is the real problem. Doing something about it will make a difference for the better.
50. I am learning (or willing) to trust other people.
51. I'm making a commitment to myself to do what I can to overcome my problem with [[insert short blank]].
52. I'm learning that it's okay to make mistakes.
53. Nobody's perfect—and I'm learning (or willing) to go easier on myself.
54. I'm willing to become (or to learn to become) self-sufficient.
55. I'm learning to let go of worrying. I can replace worrying with constructive action.
56. I am learning, one step at a time, that I can deal with the outside world.
57. I'm inherently worthy as a person. I accept myself just the way I am.

About the Author

Edmund J. Bourne, PhD, has specialized in the treatment of anxiety, phobias, and other stress-related disorders for over two decades. His self-help books have helped more than a million people, and have been translated into numerous languages. He currently resides in Florida and California.

Phone counseling for problems with panic attacks, phobias, and other anxiety difficulties is available with Edmund Bourne. For information, please call 1-415-686-7516. Further information about Bourne's work in the anxiety disorders field may be found at **helpforanxiety.com**.

For Edmund Bourne's work outside the field of anxiety disorders, please see his website, **journeysofthemind.net**.

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