

You are not the person you think you are

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Changing your thinking can change your life.

How you feel about yourself will determine how you think about yourself and how you behave, which will determine how you interact with others which will determine how they react to you.

It all starts with how you think and feel.

What are your thoughts about yourself, about your future, about circumstances? Are you positive about these things or are you negative? Because you can create your environment!

Our thoughts and beliefs create our feelings and shape our behaviours, as illustrated in the tables (right).

What are some of your opinions and behaviours that result from your thoughts and beliefs? Think about them, understand them and if necessary challenge and change them.

Our thoughts and beliefs come from sources such as:

- Childhood experiences
- People who we associate with
- Life experiences around wins and losses
- The information we glean
- Messages we receive from society
- Our innate temperament and biological disposition

At times these thoughts and beliefs can lead to destructive thinking such as:

- Black and white thinking
- Overgeneralising
- Personalising
- Filtering
- Jumping to negative conclusions
- Mindreading
- Labelling
- Blaming

Destructive thinking is also about what I refer to as 'tyranny of the should'. We all have 'rules of thumb' – our 'should' – for our lives:

- This thing should be like this
- I should do it this way

FEELINGS	
Thoughts and beliefs	Feelings
Something bad may happen	Anxiety
They did a bad thing and they shouldn't be able to get away with it	Anger
I have lost something I value	Guilt
The world is a bad place, I am a worthless person and the future is hopeless	Depression
Something good is going to happen	Excitement
I am not as good as other people	Self-loathing
That's not what I expected	Surprise

BEHAVIOURS	
Thoughts and beliefs	Behaviours
I must be loved and approved by everybody	Excessively try to please others; avoid assertive behaviour
I must do things perfectly	Procrastinate; slow, inefficient behaviour
A mistake is an opportunity to learn, not a catastrophe	Willing to try again; several times if necessary to reach goals
My life should be easy. I shouldn't have to do things that are difficult or not enjoyable	Avoid activities that are difficult or unpleasant
I am no good at this. I can't do this	Avoid learning; doing new things
If I want something, I must have it immediately	Engage in addictive behaviour
Everyone is trying their best. No one deserves to be to be judged or condemned	Get on well with most people

- I should get this price for my efforts
- People should do this

What are your 'shoulds'? Identify them and ask yourself the question 'Why?'. Why should this happen? Who says so? Is the 'should' valid?

We need to challenge our thinking and continuously ask whether what we are feeling is correct. This is easier said than done, but a skill we need to adopt for ourselves and our children.

Here is a technique you can use to challenge your thinking. I call it my ABCDE strategy.

A - **Acknowledge** the situation you are in

or may be in. What are its characteristics, its features, its context?

B - What are your **beliefs** or feelings about this situation? Listen to your thoughts and reactions. How do you feel? Is your inner voice positive or negative? Accept this voice for what it is.

C - What do you think will be the **consequence** of this situation? What do you think will happen? List them. Consider what the consequences might be.

D - **Dispute** these consequences. Say to yourself, "Is this consequence really true? Is this the most likely scenario or the worst case? Is it best case?"

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