

Identifying and Dealing with Limiting Beliefs

We all have limiting beliefs that we are only aware of at a sub-conscious level. These beliefs can help us avoid situations of risk. However, they keep us safely in our comfort zone.

Unfortunately, this can prevent us from growing and achieving the things we want. As an example, many people struggle with weight loss. With the best of intentions, they commit themselves to a new diet. Often within the week, they are struggling because they are not seeing any results. The root problem may be a limiting belief which is making success unreachable.

The analytical mind can be at a loss to recognize limiting beliefs. However, you can “reverse engineer” your previous decisions to better grasp why or why you didn’t take certain actions. This allows you to remember and recognize your thought and behavior patterns. In this way, you become more aware of your limiting belief(s). In addition, this may trigger you to think back to when and what incident(s) initiated this judgment.

There are countless limiting beliefs linked to ideas such as social awkwardness, self-confidence, diet, fitness, or even being open to trying new activities. We may be aware of our limitations and just accept them thinking there is no recourse. Effectively, we allow ourselves to become powerless to change them. Further, we often self-sabotage ourselves leading to destructive behaviors such as:

- Procrastination / Overachiever
- Self-medication with drugs or alcohol
- Emotional eating / Starvation
- Interpersonal conflict / Isolation
- Loss of self-image / Narcissism

First Step

The first step is awareness, what exactly is holding you back?

Most often than not, there is an event in your past that triggered this belief. For instance, if you were not popular in school, that may have reinforced the belief that you will never be good at interacting with others. Be completely honest with yourself about what is holding you back.

Yes, this is the most difficult step to begin any long term changes. Some examples of beliefs that keep us stuck include:

- I just have no willpower.
- I am afraid it won’t work and nothing will change anyways.
- I don’t have time to focus on me right now.

- I am too stressed / tired after a long day.

The underlying message of every limiting belief is “I told you so”.

Second Step

Why do you want to change and why is it important to you? If it is a “nice-to-do”, your commitment will be far less than if it is an urgent “must do”. For instance, you must lose 30 pounds before going in for knee surgery is more critical and motivating than you needing to fit into that “perfect dress”. Also, this is where you would identify other factors and stress points that may hinder your efforts.

Besides understanding your why, you also need to replace those limiting beliefs with more supportive ones. These are affirmations you write out. Read your new beliefs every few days. This will begin reprogramming your mind to believing you will achieve the success you desire.

Last Step

Execute a sustainable plan that you know you can stick with. Even with affirmations, expect some set backs. Probably, your own negative self-talk (inner critic) will be your greatest challenge. Be aware of sabotaging thoughts and begin to restate them with more positive ones.

Sabotaging excuse example:

It’s been 2 weeks and I don’t see any changes. Nothing ever seems to work out for me, maybe this is not the time for me.

Supportive thought example:

It’s been 2 weeks and while I don’t see any changes yet, I know I’m on the right track. This is important to me and I am worth it.

Expecting big results right away will leave you discouraged. Break it down into smaller goals, each a step towards your desired result. Celebrate each little victory. And expect a setback or two. Just refocus, dust yourself off and continue moving forward to achieving your goal.

Additional Resources:

- The Mindful Self-Compassion Workbook: A Proven Way to Accept Yourself, Build Inner Strength, and Thrive – Kristin Neff, Christopher Germer
- The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion – Christopher K. Germer
- The Gifts of Imperfection – Brenne Brown
- The Healthy Mind Toolkit – Alice Boyes