Chapter 14

Self-Defeating Thoughts and Behaviors: How to Stop Hitting Yourself in the Head With A Hammer

The principles you live by create the world you live in; if you change the principles you live by, you will change your world.

-Blaine Lee
defeating behaviors stem. In so doing, you will have strengthened your Recovery and found ways to avoid harming others.

Below is a list of common self-defeating, irrational beliefs that most people struggle with.

Pathfinder’s Checklist

Common irrational beliefs

1) I should never be emotionally or physically uncomfortable.
2) I should never be inconvenienced.
3) Life should always treat me fairly.
4) I should always be in control of myself, the people in my life, and the situations I find myself in.
5) I should never require the help of others.
6) I should never have to follow rules.
7) My feelings are created by people, places, and circumstances in my life.
8) Good feelings come from people and things external to me.
9) Everyone should approve of me.
10) I should not be held responsible for my words and actions.

I should never be emotionally or physically uncomfortable. Do you recognize how this belief exists in your life? What does it sound like in your thoughts? How does this
beliefs manifest in your words and actions? Can you identify the lengths you go to avoid feeling emotionally and physically uncomfortable? What impact do the choices you make to avoid emotional and physical discomfort have on you, the people in your life, and your recovery?

I should never require help from others. Fierce independence, a refusal to turn to others, the relenting need to go it alone—is this a sign of character, or the misguided belief that others cannot be relied on? Do you go it alone? Do you believe that to ask for help is a character flaw or an invitation to be taken advantage of? What prevents you from relying on the wisdom and support of others? What fears do you attach to the act of asking for help? What impact does your refusal to ask for help have on you and your recovery?

I should never be inconvenienced. Entitlement and self-centeredness are two driving forces in your disease. They do not stop just because you stop drinking and drugging. You need to be mindful of all the ways your sense of entitlement manifests in your beliefs, thoughts, words, and actions. How do you react when you believe you’re being inconvenienced? What are the irrational beliefs attached to your reaction? What is a different way to respond when you believe that others are inconveniencing you?

Life should treat me fairly. Here’s another belief that stems from entitlement and self-centeredness. Are you a scorekeeper, keeping track of what people say and do to you? What does your reaction to the ups and downs of life reveal about you and your expectations about how life should treat you? How does your insistence that life treat you fairly manifest in your behaviors? What impact does your insistence that life treat you fairly have on you, the people in your life, and your recovery?

I should always be in control of myself, the people in my life, and the situations I find myself in. This belief is the mother of all self-defeating beliefs. This belief is restrictive of who you are and what others can be. It is manifested from the fears you hold about life and what might happen to you if you don’t micromanage every aspect of your life. How does your belief that you should always be in control manifest itself in your thoughts, words, and actions? What impact does your need to be in control have on you, the people in your life, and your recovery?
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Good feelings come from people and things external to me. From this belief flows your choices in which you seek the comfort of food, mood-altering substances, relationships, sexual acting-out, and compulsive behaviors such as gambling, exercising, and shopping. This belief is the motivation for all behaviors that send you looking for the emotional sustenance you can’t—or won’t—provide for yourself. The only problem is that these never fill the emptiness and inevitably create more problems than they solve. How does this belief manifest in your thoughts, words, and actions? What impact do the choices this belief creates have on you, the people in your life, and your Recovery?

Everyone should approve of me. This belief creates an enormous burden on people in your life to see you for how you want to be seen rather than how they experience you. At the same time, such a belief limits how you act and think. As a result, you stop being your authentic Self and invent a persona that resembles who you believe you should be in order to be accepted by others. How does this belief manifest in your thoughts, words, and actions? What impact do the choices that this belief creates have on you, the people in your life, and your Recovery?

I should not be held responsible for my words and actions. I hope by now you can recognize the entitlement and self-centeredness embedded in this belief. You have most likely lived a large portion of your life avoiding responsibility for your words and actions. Blame, Denial, Rationalization. Those are the tools that shift responsibility—but at what cost? How does this belief manifest in your thoughts, words, and actions? What impact does the

**Pathfinder’s Exercise**

1) Pick two self-defeating behaviors that you most closely identify with.
2) Give an example of how using one behavior harms you, the people in your life, and your Recovery.
3) How do you benefit from continuing to participate in this behavior?
4) What changes do you need to make in your thinking in order to begin changing your choices?
5) What changes do you need to make in your choices in order to let go of the self-defeating behavior?
6) Repeat steps 1-5 for the second self-defeating behavior.

Identifying your self-defeating behaviors will be easier than changing them. To change them requires patience and support from other people. Don’t set yourself up to fail by creating unrealistic expectations for yourself. Let others help by giving you feedback when they observe the behaviors you’ve identified that you want to change.