

Examples of Irrational Beliefs

Adapted from "The Relaxation & Stress Reduction Workbook"

1. It is an absolute necessity for an adult to have love and approval from peers, family, and friends. In fact, pleasing all the people in your life is impossible. Even those who basically like and approve of you will be turned off by some behaviors and qualities.
2. You must be unfailingly competent and almost perfect in all you undertake. The results of believing that you must behave perfectly are self-blame for inevitable failure, lowered self-esteem, perfectionistic standards applied to mate and friends, and paralysis and fear at attempting anything.
3. Certain people are evil, wicked, and villainous and should be punished. A more realistic position is that they are behaving in ways that are antisocial or inappropriate. They are perhaps stupid, ignorant, or neurotic and may need to change their behavior.
4. It is horrible when people and things are not the way you would like them to be. This might be described as the spoiled-child syndrome. As soon as the tire goes flat the self-talk starts: "Why does this happen to me? Damn, I can't take this." Any inconvenience, problem, or failure to get your way is likely to be met with such awfulizing self-statements. The result is intense irritation and stress.
5. External events cause most human misery—people simply react as events trigger their emotions. A logical extension of this belief is that you must control the external events in order to create happiness or avoid sorrow. Because such control has limitations and we are at a loss to completely manipulate the wills of others, a sense of helplessness and chronic anxiety results. Ascribing unhappiness to events is a way of avoiding reality.
6. You should feel fear or anxiety about anything that is unknown, uncertain, or potentially dangerous. Many describe this as, "a little bell goes off and I think I ought to start worrying." They begin to rehearse their scenarios of catastrophe. Increasing the fear or anxiety in the face of uncertainty makes coping more difficult and adds to stress.
7. It is easier to avoid than to face life's difficulties and responsibilities. There are many ways of ducking responsibilities: "I should tell him I'm no longer interested—but not tonight. . . I'd like to get another job, but I'm just too tired on my days off to look. A leaky faucet won't hurt anything.
8. Happiness, pleasure, and fulfillment can only occur in the presence of others, and being alone is horrible. Pleasure, self-worth, and fulfillment can be experienced alone as well as with others (Farquhar and Lowe 1974). Being alone is growth producing and desirable at times.
9. There is a perfect love, and a perfect relationship. Subscribers to this belief often feel resentful of one close relationship after another. Nothing is quite right because they are waiting for the perfect fit, which never comes.
10. You shouldn't have to feel pain; you are entitled to a good life. The realistic position is that pain is an inevitable part of human life. Pain frequently accompanies tough, healthy decisions and the process of growth. Life is not fair, and sometimes you will suffer no matter what you do.
11. Your worth as a person depends on how much you achieve and produce. A more rational assessment of your real worth would depend on such things as your capacity to be fully alive, feeling everything it means to be human (Farquhar and Lowe 1974).
12. Anger is automatically bad and destructive. Anger is frequently cleansing and can be an honest communication of current feelings, without attacking the personal worth and security of others (Farquhar and Lowe 1974).
13. It is bad or wrong to be selfish. The truth is that no one knows your needs and wants better than you, and no one else has as great an interest in seeing them fulfilled. Your happiness is your responsibility. Being selfish means you are accepting that responsibility.

