

What are Core Beliefs?

Core beliefs are a person's most central ideas about themselves, others, and the world. These beliefs act like a lens through which every situation and life experience is seen. Because of this, people with different core beliefs might be in the same situation, but think, feel, and behave very differently.

Even if a core belief is inaccurate, it still shapes how a person sees the world. Harmful core beliefs lead to negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, whereas rational core beliefs lead to balanced reactions.

Situation: Two people with different core beliefs receive a bad grade on a test.

Person	Core Belief	Reaction
A	➡ "I am a failure."	➡ Thought: Of course I failed... why bother? Feeling: Depressed Behavior: Makes no changes.
B	➡ "I am perfectly capable, when I give my best effort."	➡ Thought: I did poorly because I didn't prepare. Feeling: Disappointed Behavior: Plans to study before the next test.

Common Harmful Core Beliefs

Core beliefs are often hidden beneath surface-level beliefs. For example, the core belief "no one likes me" might underlie the surface belief "my friends only spend time with me out of pity".

Helpless	Unlovable	Worthless	External Danger
"I am weak"	"I am unlovable"	"I am bad"	"The world is dangerous"
"I am a loser"	"I will end up alone"	"I don't deserve to live"	"People can't be trusted"
"I am trapped"	"No one likes me"	"I am worthless"	"Nothing ever goes right"

Consequences of Harmful Core Beliefs

Interpersonal Problems	Mental Health Problems
difficulty trusting others	depression
feelings of inadequacy in relationships	anxiety
excessive jealousy	substance abuse
overly confrontational or aggressive	difficulty handling stress
putting others' needs above one's own needs	low self-esteem

Facts About Core Beliefs

- People are not born with core beliefs—they are learned.
- Core beliefs usually develop in childhood, or during stressful or traumatic periods in adulthood.
- Information that contradicts core beliefs is often ignored.
- Negative core beliefs are not necessarily true, even if they *feel* true.
- Core beliefs tend to be rigid and long-standing. However, they can be changed.