

The relationship between Rules for Living and the Bottom Line

At the heart of low self-esteem is your belief that your Bottom Line is true. Unhelpful Rules for Living are like ‘escape clauses’, ways to get round the Bottom Line. For example, at heart, you might believe yourself to be incompetent. But *so long* as you work very hard all the time and set yourself high standards, you can override your incompetence and feel OK about yourself. Or you might believe yourself to be unattractive. But *so long* as you are a fount of funny stories, the life and soul of the party, maybe no one will notice and so again you can feel OK about yourself.

Rules like these can work very well, much of the time —which is why we carry on obeying them. For long periods, they may protect you from the pain of low self-esteem, allow you to feel reasonably good about yourself, even if you have underlying doubts. Unfortunately, however, there is a fundamental problem with them. Rules allow you to wallpaper over what you feel to be the real truth about yourself (your Bottom Line). But they do not change it. Indeed, the more successful they are, and the better you are at meeting their demands, the less opportunity they give you to stand back and take stock, question your Bottom Line and adopt a more accepting and appreciative point of view. So the Bottom Line stays intact, waiting to be wheeled into place whenever your Rules are in danger of being broken.

Your personal Rules determine the standards you expect of yourself, what you should do in order to be loved and accepted, and how you should behave in order to feel that you are a good and worthwhile person.

	Core Belief	Rules for Living
Briony	I am bad	If I allow anyone close to me, then they will hurt and exploit me and therefore I must never let anyone see my true self.
Rajiv	I am not good enough	If someone criticises me, then it means I have failed. If I don't always get it right, then I will never get anywhere in life therefore I must always get it right
Evie	I am fat and ugly	My worth depends on how I look and what I weigh.
Kate	I am unlovable	Unless I do everything people expect of me, I will be rejected. If I ask for what I need, then I will be disappointed.
Lin	I am unimportant I am inferior	If someone is not interested in me, then it's because I am unworthy of interest Nothing I do is worthwhile unless it is recognised by others.
Tom	I am stupid	It is better not to try than to fail.

Identifying our Underlying Assumptions and Rules for Living provides a deeper understanding of the roots of our behaviours and our automatic thoughts. Identifying our Assumptions and Rules allows us the opportunity to evaluate whether they are helpful or unhelpful, and gives us a chance to look at the possibility of constructing new Assumptions and Rules for Living that may work better in our lives.