

Underlying Assumptions

Underlying Assumptions are beliefs and rules that lie beneath the surface and guide our

- automatic thoughts
- emotional reactions, and
- behaviours

They help explain why the same types of automatic thoughts and behaviours come up over and over again in therapy discussions and thought records.

Psychotherapy aims to identify and test the underlying assumptions that give rise to automatic thoughts that maintain distressing moods and behaviours.

Developing new underlying assumptions can lead to meaningful change and greater happiness.

Identifying Underlying Assumptions

Look through your thought records or memory and Identify some specific times when you have had especially strong emotional reaction:

1. “If ... then ...”

To identify underlying assumptions, put a *behaviour* or *situation* that triggers a *strong mood* into a sentence that begins with “If ...” and follow that by “then ...” and let your mind complete the sentence.

If I *exercise* to lose weight, then ... I will just gain it back again, so what the use.

2. “If I don’t ... then ...”

It can be helpful sometimes to write a sentence that says the opposite: “If I *don’t* ... then ...”

If I *don’t exercise* to lose weight, then ... I won’t have to get up to early in the morning.

3. “If ... then (what am I afraid might happen?) ... ”

As well as trying the above method it can sometimes be helpful to put the frequent behaviour in the “If ...” part, and follow with “then ... (what am I afraid might happen?)

If I *exercise* to lose weight, then ... (what am I afraid might happen?) ... I will just gain it back again, so what's the use.

4. Especially with the “Don’t” it can sometimes help to add “What do I hope will happen?”

If I *don't exercise* to lose weight, then ... (what do you *hope* will happen?) ... I won't have to get up to early in the morning.

5. Or a combination of the above:

If I *exercise* to lose weight, then ... (what am I *afraid* might happen?) ... I will just gain it back again, so what the use.

If I *don't exercise* to lose weight, then ... (what do you *hope* will happen?) ... I won't have to get up to early in the morning.

Summary

In short then you can try these three methods and see what you come up with:

1. If (Insert a situation that triggers an intense mood, or behaviour your struggling with), then ... (write what comes to mind)
2. (Insert a situation that triggers an intense mood, or behaviour you're struggling with), then ... (what am I afraid might happen?) ...
3. If (Insert a situation that triggers an intense mood, or behaviour you're struggling with), then ... (what do I hope might happen?) ...