

negative self-evaluations

Negative Self-Evaluations & Low-Self-Esteem

Negative self-evaluations are negative thoughts that commonly occur when you encounter an 'At-Risk Situation' that is, when your unhelpful rules or assumptions are broken and hence your negative core beliefs are activated. When this happens you will tend to evaluate yourself in a negative way, becoming harsh and critical of who you are as a person. You will tend to:

- Tell yourself that you "should" have done this or "shouldn't" have done that, chastising yourself and beating yourself up, for not meeting the standards you have set for yourself
- Put negative and derogatory labels on yourself, calling yourself hurtful names like "pathetic," "useless," "idiot," and
- Make sweeping generalisations about yourself, based on a very specific event, saying things such as "I am always doing this," or "Everything is ruined."



When you are so critical of yourself, you will tend to behave in particular ways – often engaging in unhelpful behaviours. You may:

- Withdraw or isolate yourself from family or friends,
- Try to overcompensate for things,
- Neglect opportunities, responsibilities or self-care
- Be passive rather than assertive with others

At the end of the day, the unhelpful thoughts and behaviours contribute to you feeling depressed, low, sad, guilty – and this is taken as confirmation that your negative core beliefs are true.

Some people think that making negative self-evaluations is a good thing. Some people think that being critical and harsh on yourself keeps you grounded, or stops you from getting too big for your boots, prevents you from becoming a 'tall poppy, or that it spurs you on, motivating you to do better. Some of these might be commonly held beliefs, but are they really true? Is putting yourself down and criticising yourself actually a good and healthy thing to do? If it is, then we would do it to our loved ones regularly, however most of us respond the opposite way, with compassion and encouragement when times are tough. So if this is what you would do for other human beings, why is it that you don't do it for yourself?

Challenging Negative Self-Evaluations

One way to address your negative self-evaluations is to challenge them, and develop more balanced self-evaluations. Our thoughts and evaluations are often **opinions** we have, rather than **facts**. Therefore they are open to question, and should not be something we just blindly accept if they are causing us distress. Instead, you can dispute, dissect, examine, and assess them – like a detective or lawyer would, to see how realistic they are and put things in perspective.

Challenging your negative self-evaluations isn't something you should do in your head as this can get messy and confusing. The best way is to write it down. To help you through the process, we suggest using the worksheet *Thought Diary for Negative Self-Evaluations*. This helps you work through the process step-by-step, making things clearer and more useful for you.

The Thought Diary will first ask you to **identify your negative self-evaluations**. To do this, ask yourself:

- What is the situation I am in?*
- What am I saying to myself?*
- How am I evaluating myself?*
- How am I putting myself down?*
- How am I criticising myself?*



Now you are ready to begin to **challenge your negative self-evaluations**, by asking yourself:

- What is the evidence for my evaluations?*
- What is the evidence against my evaluations?*
- Are these opinions I have of myself or facts?*
- How helpful is it for me to evaluate myself in this way?*
- How else could I view the situation? What other perspectives might there be?*
- What advice would I give to a friend in this situation?*
- Are there any positives that I am ignoring?*
- What would be more helpful behaviour I could carry out?*

The ultimate aim of doing this Thought Diary is for you to develop more **Balanced Self-Evaluations**, which takes a lot of practice. If you work through the entire Thought Diary for challenging your negative self-evaluations, it is likely that you will experience a decrease in your belief in the negative self-evaluations you were making and a decrease in the intensity of your negative emotions, particularly depression. A Thought Diary will help you see yourself in a less harsh, more positive and kinder light, rather than letting your negative opinion of yourself constantly interfere with how you live your life.