



by Rich Wyler
for



Beliefs Inquiry: Challenging Distressing Thoughts

1. Write out your distressing belief as clearly and succinctly as possible:

- A distressing belief is a thought causes you to feel shame, fear, panic, depression, or other dark and painful feelings. It's probable a version of a belief you've carried around with you much of your life.
- Examples: I am not as masculine as other men are. I'm not worthy. I'll never succeed. She shouldn't have said those things to me. He doesn't value my friendship.

2. Ask yourself simply, **Is it true?**

- Meaning: Is it a fact (observable data)? Or is it "story" (judgment, belief, interpretation of other facts)?
- Get outside yourself to ask the question "Is it true?" from the perspective of a dispassionate third-party observer.
- Yes, of course it *feels* true at times. But would reasonable people almost universally agree that this is indisputable fact? If the belief is, "I'm not as masculine as other men," which other men are you comparing yourself to? According to whose definition of masculinity?
- Follow-up question: Can you know *with absolute certainty* that this belief is true?

Write your answer here (and be honest!):

3. Ask yourself: How do I react when I think that thought or believe that idea?

- Consider both what you *feel* and what you *do* as a result.
- Examples: I feel ashamed. I feel envy. I start to lust. I get angry. I go to the gym to work out more. I cut off contact with her (or him).
- Be honest and thorough.

Write your answer here (be honest and *thorough*):

4. Ask yourself: What are the benefits (payoffs) of holding on to this belief?

- What do you get out of believing this thought?
- This should be a stress-free reason to hold onto the belief—something that truly benefits you.
- If you can't see a benefit in holding on to the belief, can you see a reason to drop it?

Write your answer here:

5. Turn the thought around. Look for ways to state the opposite of the original belief.

- If the belief is, "I'm not as masculine as other men," turn it around to:
 - "I am as masculine as other men" (turn it around to the opposite)
 - "Other men are not as masculine as I am" (turn it around to the other person or people).
- If the belief is, "He doesn't value my friendship," three turn-arounds could be:
 - "He does value my friendship" (turn it around to the opposite)
 - "I don't value his friendship" (turn it around to the other person or people).
 - "I don't value my friendship" (turn it around to self).

Write your turnarounds here:

6. Ask yourself: Are there any ways in which the turnarounds are just as true or even truer than the original belief?

- How, specifically?
- Look for 2-3 genuine, specific examples of how each turnaround may be true at times.
- Example: If the turnaround is, "I am as masculine as other men," consider all the ways that you are in fact similar to other men.

Write your answers here:

7. Imagine (visualize) yourself without that old thought or belief. Ask yourself: Who would you be without your old story?

- Imagine you couldn't even think that old negative thought again. Everything else is the same but you can't think the thought. What would be different?
- Feel your answer, don't just think it.

Write about it here:

8. Ask yourself: If you could choose your beliefs, what would you prefer to believe if you could?

- Example: "I am masculine enough." "I am who I am supposed to be." "I am like other men in most ways, and different in some ways—and I like that about me."

Write your preferred belief here:

9. Try on the preferred belief and see how it feels.

- Don't try to talk yourself into believing it. Rather, imagine or visualize who you would be if you went about your life with your preferred belief rather than the original one. What would it feel like to be you then?
- Try it on like a suit or shoes. How does it feel?

Write about how it feels and how you react to "wearing" the preferred belief:

10. Ask yourself, Am I willing to release my attachment to the old belief, and to open myself to the new belief instead?

- Oftentimes, the problem isn't the belief so much as our *attachment* to it. We can get so attached to (or invested in) the old, distressing belief that it becomes our identity, our dogma, or our burden to carry.
- Are you willing to let go of that old, harmful attachment, and instead open yourself to believing something that feels lighter, more hopeful and more affirming?

Write your final thoughts here:

A Final Thought

Notice that, in general, if we are listening to lies, we feel a sense of hopelessness, darkness, resentment, stress or other forms of distress. When we are listening to truth, we typically feel uplifted, hopeful, calm—or at least resolved and more at peace. The very fact that a thought causes distress is a very good indication that it's probably a lie.

—Rich Wyler