

Are Your Beliefs Setting You Up for Unhappiness?

Each of us holds core beliefs about life. These belief systems have an incredible impact on our ability to be happy in life because they have a tendency to create expectations that all too often leave us feeling disappointed, resentful or angry. By uncovering these core beliefs, many of them sub-conscious, we can examine their validity and thereby save ourselves from much self-imposed unhappiness.

For example, I may hold a belief that people should be kind to one another. Conceptually this is a good idea. The world would be a better place if we were all kind with one another. The problem arises when we go on to expect people to be kind to each other. This is what is known as an unenforceable expectation. In other words, we cannot enforce that expectation on others. We do not have that kind of control and more importantly, not everyone holds that same belief or is capable of being kind. Sometimes people are kind and sometimes they are not. That just happens to be the truth. By expecting kindness, we set ourselves up to be disappointed, angry or resentful when our expectation is not met.

It is the difference in a perspective that states this is the way that life is supposed to be versus this is the way life actually is. I may feel that life should be fair and of course when life isn't, I will be sorely upset. Reality states that life is not always fair and even though I might be able to state intellectually, I still hold onto the belief that states the contrary.

What are some of the central beliefs that set us up? Our beliefs are predicated on the phrase 'should be'. That in and of itself speaks volumes! So life should be fair, easy, happy, meaningful, abundant and go according to plan. People should be kind, empathetic, supportive, nurturing, understanding, joyful, loving and truthful. Children should not get terminally sick and suffer. Peace and love should prevail. Governments should be just. Politicians should not lie and cheat. People should be tolerant. Freedom should be available to all of the earth's inhabitants.

You may say that you aren't so naïve. Maybe yes, maybe no. but think about it. Examine the last time you became really upset. Could there have been a belief underneath that contributed to the upset. Here's a simple instance: I get tremendously upset because my daughter does not keep her room clean. Actually, it's a mess. It doesn't matter how many times I remind her. So why do I get so upset when reality states that teenagers are slob?

One, I have a core belief in cleanliness and order. That's the way I do things and that's the way I expect things to be done in my home. Secondly, I am resisting reality: teens are not neat. Its inherent in the species. My core belief is not in sync with her core belief or reality for that matter. My expectations result in upset.

Happily, there is a solution. I accept the fact that what I expect is not to be. I establish an agreement taking into account my needs and hers as well. Once a week she cleans the room and if it doesn't meet my standards, so be it. It is better than beating my head against a brick wall.

Our core beliefs are not facts of life. They are just our personal beliefs. Just because I believe that friends should be loyal does not mean they will be. Sometimes they won't. I need to get that as a condition of being alive. It all goes back to accepting the true nature of life versus how we believe life should be. It will save you much grief. Its yet another step in learning acceptance.