

1 I must be liked to accepted by every important person in my life, for almost everything I do.

The approval of others is pleasant but not essential. In order to live life fully we need to express ourselves, which means that at times we will do things of which others disapprove. If we are constantly trying to avoid disapproval we will either become passive individuals or people with a poor sense of self. If, despite our efforts, we are disapproved of, the result can be devastating, because our self-esteem is based on what others think of us.

2 I must be successful, competent and achieving in everything I do if I am to consider myself worthwhile.

This means perpetually striving to do better and never being satisfied. Our value is directly equated to our achievements. The consequences are that we cannot relax, we feel useless if not working, and become perfectionists or immobilised by procrastination. We never achieve quite enough to feel really good because there is always something else. Again the net result is dissatisfaction. It is important to overcome the fear of failure and to view failure as something actually helpful.

3 It is awful and terrible when things are not the way I would like them to be. Things should be different.

This is the belief that life should be fair and just and satisfy our needs. Life is not fair and just. Holding this belief will mean that reality will be very painful and we will be constantly disappointed, angry, frustrated and depressed. Watch out for 'shoulds' and 'oughts' and learn to live with how things are, rather than how ideally we would like them to be, accepting our own limitations and the limitations of others. There is a wise saying that captures the essence of this belief: 'Let me have the determination to change what I can change, the serenity to accept what I cannot, and the wisdom to know the difference between the two'.

4 I must feel anxious, upset and preoccupied if something is, or may be, dangerous.

It is reasonable to take necessary steps to avoid danger. But excessive worry about things out of our control is unproductive. Watch out for 'awfulising', 'catastrophising' and 'wouldn't it be terrible if' thoughts. Often, even when the worst possible outcome is explored, it is still not as bad as we imagine. Being human is about overcoming groundless fears and anxieties.

5 Human unhappiness is caused by events beyond our control so people have little ability to control their negative feelings.

This belief can lead to passive acceptance of what fate brings when very often we can play a large part in controlling our own destiny. It also implies that 'someone out there' should sort things out. We can all influence our moods and how we feel; watch out for the thought, 'I can't help it, I'm just depressed'.

6 It is easier to avoid facing many of life's difficulties and responsibilities than to face them.

We can all waste our time hoping that something will magically work out rather than committing ourselves to positive action. Procrastination is largely about trying to avoid failure, but little is ever achieved without failure or risk. If we fail, have a bad experience or get hurt, we learn something. If we avoid these challenges, going for the easy option, we learn less and our confidence is gradually eroded.

7 The past is all-important, so if something once strongly affected one's life, it cannot be altered.

Thoughts like, 'That's just the way I am – I can't change' indicate this belief. Everybody can learn new skills all the time. It does not necessarily mean that we will be very good at those skills, but mostly we can achieve competence. We can all change the way we behave to some extent. Imagine your life as a film with you as the director and script writer; rewrite your own script.

8 When people act badly, inadequately or unfairly, I blame them and view them as completely bad or pathetic – including myself.

This touches on our tendency to expect others to behave in the way that we want them to, or think that they should behave. But ask yourself, 'Why should they behave in that way?' The more rigidly we hold these expectations for others the more disappointed and angry we will become when they let us down. If we have these expectations for ourselves it can lead us to feeling excessively guilty and depressed. We also have a tendency to blame and condemn people totally on the basis of our observation on aspects of their behaviour. We might say, 'He's absolutely hopeless', if for example, a colleague turns up late for a meeting. What would be more logical would be to describe his specific behaviour and say, 'He's a poor timekeeper', rather than making such a dismissive generalisation.

9 Maximum happiness can be achieved by inertia and inaction, or by passively enjoying oneself.

People who say that they are bored often hold this belief. There is an expectation that there are lots of interesting things out there to entertain and keep us all happy. If we just sit back and expect to be entertained we will not feel satisfied. Real satisfaction, in the long term, comes from active participation and skill development rather than passively receiving. Getting actively involved and committed means taking risks, facing new experiences and facing fears. What you get out is proportional to what you put in.

10 Everyone should be dependent upon others and I need someone stronger than myself on whom I can rely.

This belief often produces the thought, 'I cannot live without somebody', but the reality is that we all can. This belief distracts us from learning to live with ourselves first and diminishes our own personal sense of power.

(Adapted from **Ellis & Harper**, 1975)