

We are all prone to 'demanding thinking', using the words, 'should', 'ought' and 'must', to some extent. However, the more we are inclined to use these words, in our internal thinking or our speech, the more pressure or stress we apply to ourselves. At the moment I am thinking, 'I should finish this section of the book this week' and 'I should spend more time with the children'. The more 'shoulds' and 'oughts' we have weighing down on our shoulders, the more we are likely to feel frustration, disappointment, anger, guilt and depression. The word 'should' can be traced back to the Anglo-Saxon word

'sceolde'; undoubtedly we are scolding ourselves when we use the word. The worst should of all is probably; 'I should be successful at everything that I strive to do'. This puts an almost impossible burden upon us.

To a large extent we learn this type of thinking from our childhood. The more rigid these beliefs, the more critical we are likely to be towards ourselves or others. Try the following exercises to 'loosen up' or delete some of these shoulds from your internal vocabulary.

■ Exercise

① Make a list of five 'should' statements about how you think you ought to be:

- 1 *I should* _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

② Make a list of five statements about how you think others ought to be:

- 1 *Other people should* _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

③ **Challenge:** Take the most demanding should statement from each section and challenge it. Where does this should come from? Who is it who says I should? Where is it written that I should? Why should I? What is so important?

④ **Carry out a cost benefit analysis:** Write down a list of what the advantages and disadvantages of having this rule are.

⑤ **Bring on the substitute:** Rewrite the statements substituting a different phrase for 'should'. For example 'it would be nice if... ', or 'I would prefer it if... '.

⑥ **'Should' busting:** Take five minutes out of every day to recite or write down all your should, must and ought statements. This will hopefully help you to see how unhelpful, if not ridiculous, most of these statements are.