

The Vertical Arrow Technique

(How to identify, understand, and contradict self-defeating beliefs)

1. Identify a negative thought about a situation, which is upsetting you.

If this were true, what is causing me to be upset?



2. Identify a second negative thought.

If this were true, what is causing me to be upset?



3. Identify a third negative thought.

If this were true, what is causing me to be upset?



4. Additional negative thoughts....

Process Your Negative Thoughts:

What do these negative thoughts tell me about my values (or the meaning of my life)?

What are my basic assumptions about interpersonal relationships and my self-concept?

Reference:

Burns, D. D. (1989). *The feeling good handbook*. New York: William Morrow.

The **Downward Arrow Technique** is a tool to help uncover the belief systems that influence our behavior and mood. These belief systems are often unclear to us and uncovering them can make it easier to notice them and not act on them via painful patterns of destructive behavior. Although there are many types of belief, there are two main types: **core beliefs** and **core fears**.

Here is the technique for uncovering a core belief.

1. **Write down a thought that has been bothering you.**
2. **Ask yourself “What does this mean about me?”**
3. **Keep going until you get to the underlying core belief.**

For example:

My thought: *My friend was rude to me when she blurted out a secret I had told her.*

What does this mean about me? *It means that she doesn't care about me.*

What does that mean about me? *It means that she isn't really my friend.*

What does that mean about me? *It means that I don't have good friends that respect and care about me properly.*

What does that mean about me? *It means that there is something wrong with me where people don't respect or care about me?*

What does that mean about me? *I am not worth caring about or respecting.*

Core belief: I am not worth caring about.

Here is the technique for uncovering a core fear:

1. **Write down a thought that has been bothering you.**
2. **Ask yourself “What is the worst thing that could happen?”**
3. **Keep going until you get to the underlying core fear.**

For example:

My thought: *My boss is angry with me.*

What is the worst thing that could happen? *She might fire me.*

What is the worst thing that could happen? *I would be unemployed.*

What is the worst thing that could happen? *I might not be able to find another job for a long time (6 months)*

What is the worst thing that could happen? *I wouldn't be able to pay my mortgage.*

What is the worst thing that could happen? *I wouldn't have anywhere to live. I might become homeless.*

Core Fear: I will become homeless

How To Challenge Core Beliefs and Core Fears.

Sometimes it will be immediately clear to you that the core belief/fear is illogical. For example, you might immediately understand the chance of homelessness from unemployment is very low. So you might not be so concerned about it because you understand the unconscious fear. The picture contains an example of this.

Lost your pen = no pen
No pen = no notes
No notes = no study
No study = Fail
Fail = no diploma
No diploma = no work
No work = no money
No money = no food
No food = skinny
Skinny = ugly
Ugly = no love
No love = no marriage
No marriage = no children
No children = alone
Alone = depression
Depression = sickness
Sickness = death



If you lose your pen

You will die