

Values and Beliefs

Our values and beliefs have a huge impact on our lives. Ask most people, though, and they would not be able to tell you unprompted what their core values and beliefs are!

Values

'Values' are principles, standards, or qualities considered worthwhile or desirable, in other words, what we regard as important. They are the basis of our actions, especially when ethical issues are involved. Values are often shaped in a rather haphazard way as we mature. As children, we tend to adopt the values of those around us, then later we modify them according to our own learning and experiences.

♣ Take a pen and notepad and write down:

- What do you stand for? What would you defend with your life if necessary?
- What do you enjoy the most? What really turns you on? What turns you off altogether?
- What, for you, would make the world a better place? A worse place?
- What value do you place on your health?

Reflect on what you have written. What does it tell you about yourself?

Beliefs

A belief is an idea we accept as true. Unlike thoughts, beliefs come with deeply rooted feelings of certainty. If we really believe something, its effects follow us moment by moment, whether or not we are consciously thinking of it at the time. Our strongest beliefs usually concern 'the way it is', including religion, moral values and 'do's' and 'don'ts' such as respect for law and order, family responsibilities and loyalty to one's country, region or community.

Beliefs create intense feelings. Criticise a person's beliefs, and they feel under attack. Once a belief takes root, the mind continually searches for the evidence to prove that it is right, and we behave in accordance with the belief.

Although most beliefs are learned in our early years, in adulthood we can consciously and deliberately change a belief that isn't helpful, including restricting beliefs about ourselves.

Beliefs affect us whether they are true or false. We behave according to *perceptions* and *understandings*, which may, of course, be deeply flawed. Hence it is essential to identify any beliefs held by a client that could prevent them from achieving wellness. Irrational beliefs are related to many health conditions and are the main causes of emotional disorders such as panic attacks, phobias, anxiety and low self-esteem.

Consider and reflect:

Are you influenced or controlled by any beliefs that you know are not true? Where do you think they came from?

Do you believe you create your own circumstances, including your state of health, or that life is something that happens to you?

Do you believe that there is always a way to achieve your goals - you just have to find it?

Challenging redundant beliefs

When you have a client who neither *values* their health nor truly *believes* that they can get better (e.g. their illness is hereditary or down to 'karma'), then their chances of a full recovery are slim. In many cases, helping them to change these dysfunctional values and beliefs is a job for a trained counsellor or psychotherapist. Psychologists, especially those coming from the 'Cognitive Behavioural' school such as Aaron Beck and Albert Ellis, have devised a number of techniques which have had a great deal of success. BIH practitioners should know how to recognise such values and beliefs, and refer the client on when necessary.

If, however, it is the BIH practitioner who has the unhelpful value or belief, then there is much he or she can do to change the situation. For example, Ellis's 'ABCD' model has been particularly influential in helping individuals to examine the evidence and deconstruct dysfunctional beliefs. 'A' is an 'Activating Event' which leads to an emotional or behavioural response, and 'C' the 'Consequence', i.e. a reaction, thought, emotion etc. However, 'C' is never caused directly by 'A', though, but by 'B' – one's beliefs about 'A'. 'D' is 'disputing' - examining the beliefs about the situation, dissecting the evidence, and challenging them until they lose their potency. Are there alternative explanations and new meanings that cast different light on the incident?

Another way of challenging dysfunctional beliefs is Byron Katie's 'Inquiry Method' which is covered in Module BIH 9 and in the second seminar.

Relevance

Values and beliefs have a huge impact on health, illness and recovery, so listen for the values and beliefs expressed by your clients and also listen also for the values and beliefs they *imply* but *don't* express, since there may be hidden clues about their health problems.

And listen to your own values and beliefs too. They have a big impact on your effectiveness.