

## Stinking Thinking and Mistaken Beliefs

All of us develop “mythconceptions” to some degree that color our thinking. We develop mistaken beliefs in three different areas: beliefs about ourselves, our feelings, and the world around us. Mistaken beliefs about ourselves can be beliefs such as: I am not good enough; I’m not lovable; I’m not worthy. Mistaken beliefs about our emotions are beliefs such as: My feelings are bad; having feelings are weak; my feelings are wrong and must be suppressed or hidden; I’m too sensitive. And our mistaken beliefs about the world are beliefs such as: The world is not safe; the world is scary; people are out to get me; there isn’t any support for me.

Our myth conceptions are just that—mistaken concepts which cause faulty thinking. Our mistaken beliefs and assumptions spawn stinking thinking. Stinking Thoughts are mistaken thoughts that appear as factual, but are not true. Stinking Thinking takes many forms: rationalizing, making excuses, being defensive, over-generalizing, thinking you are unloved or unworthy, labeling, blaming, minimizing, projecting, being prejudiced, mind reading, being superstitious, obfuscating, all-or-nothing thinking—all ways of fudging or denying the truth and escaping from the deeper reality underneath.

When you learn to recognize your Stinking Thinking for what it really is—thoughts masquerading as truth—you can see that it stems from mistaken beliefs. This false thinking keeps you from achieving what you could and discourages you from trying new things, taking risks, and creating MORE. You may use these thoughts to talk you out of pursuing MORE before you even get a fighting chance. Stinking thinking lowers motivation and kills hope. Yet, it’s how most of us think and talk most of the time.

Complete the Stinking Thinking Template. Pick a demeaning, judgmental, rationalizing thought you have about yourself, your feelings, or your world, and fill out the template to see what the belief could be underneath. Every time you blame another, shame yourself, or justify yourself, you are indulging in stinking thinking related to your mistaken beliefs.

# STINKING THINKING TEMPLATE

1. What event, situation, or circumstance triggered your stinking thinking, tactic, or trance?

2. What was your stinking thought, or tactic?

Examples of Negative Thoughts

(stinking thinking):

That's too hard.

I can't do that.

I'm not ready.

That's too much.

I'll do it later.

That's too far.

I don't need it.

I've done that.

I don't have time.

I don't have enough money.

I'm tired.

I can't.

3. Name 3 other instances in your life where this stinking thinking has come up.

4. What are the feelings you experienced?

Fear

Hurt

Anger

Sadness

Joy

# STINKING THINKING TEMPLATE

## 5. Identify some of the mistaken beliefs that may have triggered your stinking thinking.

Examples of Mistaken Beliefs:

I am not enough, not good enough.

I'm too much.

I'm alone and on my own.

I am not loveable.

I'm not okay.

I have to earn love.

I have something wrong with me.

I don't matter.

My feelings/emotions are bad.

There is no support for me.

The world is an uncaring place.

People are out to get me.

The world is dangerous.

There are not enough resources (time, money) to go around.

There is not enough love to go around.

## 6. What is the deeper yearning underneath the mistaken belief(s)?

Examples of yearning:

I yearn to matter.

I yearn to make a difference.

I yearn to be seen.

I yearn to be heard.

I yearn to be known.

I yearn to connect with others.

# STINKING THINKING TEMPLATE

7. What are alternative ways you could meet your deeper yearning?
8. What supportive, creative, generative, positive thoughts could you have thought in that situation?

## Examples of Positive Thoughts:

That's challenging, but I'm willing to engage in the challenge.

I've never done that before, but I'm willing to give it a try.

I am afraid, but I'm willing to go for it anyway.

This is tough, but it's not insurmountable.

I need to apply myself now because putting it off is just an excuse.

I haven't made the time but I can choose to.

I don't have an immediate solution for how to afford it, but if I intend it I can make it happen.

This happens from time to time, but I can get this done on time.

I wonder what he meant by that. I'll ask him.

My contributions count in the big picture.

I feel upset, but that doesn't make me a bad person.

I didn't do that sooner, but I can learn from that mistake.

# EXAMPLES OF YEARNING

To be secure

- To exist
- To be safe, to be secure
- To connect, to bond
- To trust

To love & care for, respond to others

- To care for
- To nurture
- To love

To relate, see and be seen, know and be known, connect

- To be seen, heard, known, and understood
- To see, hear, & know others
- To touch & be touched
- To feel "felt"
- To empathize

To have my existence appreciated

- To love and be loved
- To be affirmed, appreciated
- To be cared for
- To be respected

To express my essence, sense of self, potential

- To express
- To experience fully
- To learn, grow, develop
- To create

- To be separate, have an identity
- To influence
- To excel
- To fulfill my potential

To have a sense of mattering

- To matter
- To be valued and to value
- To contribute
- To do what I came here on Earth to do
- To make a difference
- To please God
- To fulfill my purpose
- To unfold my destiny

To exchange and be connected with others

- To belong
- To connect
- To matter
- To be close
- To communicate with others
- To commune with others
- To make deep contact with another
- To be intimate

To be connected to something greater

- To be connected to something greater than myself
- To feel connected to the greater whole
- To be one with all
- To know God or the creator for union with all that is

# STINKING THINKING CATEGORIES

1. **Overgeneralization: you view a negative event as a never-ending pattern**
  - a. All or Nothing: you look at things in the absolute ... black white... no gray
  - b. Magnification: you blow things out of proportion
  - c. Can't/Won't - Helpless/Hopeless
  - d. Always/Never
  
2. **Jumping to conclusions/Irrational conclusions: you conclude that things are bad without any evidence**
  - a. Mind Reading: you assume that people are reacting negatively to you
  - b. Fortune Telling: you predict that things will turn out badly
  - c. Projection: attributing to others things I am feeling inside
  - d. Mental Filter: you dwell on the negatives and ignore the positives
  - e. Prejudice: you avoid the facts by deciding ahead of time.
  - f. Discounting the Positives: you insist that your accomplishments or positives do not count
  - g. Magical Thinking
  - h. Helpless/Hopeless
  
3. **Emotional Reasoning: you reason from how you feel**  
(Ex. "I feel stupid therefore I must be.") and fail to reality test.
  
4. **Should Statements: you criticize yourself or others with "should", "shouldn't", "must", "ought", and "have to"**
  
5. **Blame/Shame: blame yourself for something you weren't entirely responsible for or you blame others and overlook that you contributed**
  - a. Labeling: instead of saying "I made a mistake", you tell yourself "I am a loser", "I am stupid", "I am a jerk"
  
6. **Looped Thinking - Obsession/perseveration**

Source: Revised from Daytop