

Eliminating Self-Defeating Behavior Workshop - Session Three  
Dr. David Coombs

**The Power of Internal and External Choices**

Self-defeating behaviors do not happen on their own. Each time an SDB is used, choice is required to activate it and repetitive choices are needed to keep it going. People think they do their SDBs all the time, but they don't. They are used when circumstances trigger painful memories from the past. That illustrates that we really do control when and where we do our SDBs.

The human mind has three sections: conscious, pre-conscious, and sub-conscious--that deep inner area that is often hidden. In this session you are asked to dig deeper into your sub-conscious mind to recognize how you label yourself and bring to light your inner choices that dictate your SDBs.

It is important to distinguish between two areas of choice: the inner and the outer choices. The inner choice is made before you are confronted with a situation that demands a response. The choice is always, "Will I respond as just me, without any defeating behaviors, or will I undermine myself by not responding as my best and MOST COMPLETE SELF?" This inner choice is connected to daring to be completely one's best in a moment of living. For instance: Do I dare test my intelligence? Do I dare see just how adequate I am as a male or female? Do I dare put my ability as a warm caring person, a creative writer, talented painter, intelligent teacher, quality parent, or productive worker on the line? Do I dare test and behave as my true and best self?

Once you decide in your heart you no longer want to use your SDBs, you have made a powerful inner choice. Now the stage is set for outer choices which are needed to carry out the inner decision. For example, maybe you habitually label yourself as a poor student because you did have some painful experiences earlier in life when you fell short academically. Possibly you had a crises in your home that affected your school work. But now, after being introduced to an Eliminating Self-Defeating Behavior Workshop, you decide to re-label yourself as a bright and intelligent student. That is your new inner choice. You begin by attending every one of your classes and arriving on time; you sit in the front of the class, listen attentively, finish assignments on time. In short, you perform the behaviors that bright and intelligent students do.

Your new inner decision was to face your fear of failing. You choose to no longer label yourself as a poor student. You now make outer decisions to behave as good students do and thus prove to yourself that you have the power to eliminate your self-defeating behavior, that is your fear of failing; you no longer think you are lacking the intelligence to succeed.

Another example, If you have made the inner decision that you are not good at making decisions and thus have labeled yourself as one who cannot trust his own judgement, then you will make outer choices that require you to manipulate others to decide for you. This inner decision was made sometime ago when you made a poor decision or maybe even several major decisions. Unfortunately, you use this as proof, that sure enough, **every** decision from that point on is certain to be wrong. It is an unfortunate choice to exaggerate this to mean that all your decisions are going to be wrong. How unfair you are to yourself. No one makes all decisions perfectly. Now is the time to change that inner decision to a more correct one, such as: "I am getting better at making good decisions and I am learning to trust my own judgement." With this new label you can now stop making those external choices to manipulate others to make decisions for you. You can stop acting helpless and powerless. You can stop looking weak; stop playing the victim who hopes others will rescue you.

Another example, an inner choice is, "I'll not be as attractive a woman/man as I can be," then outer choices are needed to take on excessive weight, to dress and groom sloppily, to maintain hostility, to misinterpret how other people respond, to be easily offended, etc. Or If an inner choice is to remain single, then outer choices are needed to prevent marriage by always playing the field to find the right one; eligible candidates are threatening so they must be too good, too old, too young, etc. Or you may see yourself as inadequate and unworthy.

The inner choice is usually recognizable from its outer manifestations or its results. By alienating members of the opposite sex before relationships can deepen, one can avoid testing his adequacy to get along with others. Using behaviors to withdraw and avoid other people keeps one from seeing how acceptable he is to others.

Eliminating a self-defeating behavior begins with changing your inner decisions about how you label yourself, how you define yourself, or how you have convinced yourself that you are not good or at

least not good enough. Therefore, unless you confront your inner choices you will continue to see yourself as inadequate and helpless.

You must become aware that you decide when and where to confront a situation as your best and whole self. When you decide to face your fears and courageously chose not to use your SDB, at that moment, you realize that you do have the power, the agency, to change. You will experience a sense of control over your own life. You will realize you have the power to use your SDB or use the creative, non-SDB route. When you clearly see that you can choose the SDB or the non-SDB route, you stand at the moment of behavior change and freedom from your SDB.

Because we are free agents, meaning we have freedom of behavioral choice in any moment of time, we can exercise that agency and take control over the choices open to us in each moment of living. Sometimes it is difficult to take this control before we do our SDB, or to recognize at which point in time we made the inner choice to do this SDB again. If it is too difficult to catch it before it happens, we can still find this beneficial, by back tracking to discover how we got in to the SDB route again. We can then learn to recognize the road signs that led us into it and which support the negative inner choice. As we do this back tracking carefully, we can also script alternative routes or ways of behaving that are non-self-defeating. We can ask ourselves, "How should I have handled this in a more healthy way?" The more alternatives open to us the easier it will be to choose to be our best self in the next situation. This becomes a powerful exercise if we actually write out what we wish we had done.

### **Why is it so hard to control our choices?**

Apparently, assuming full responsibility for personal choice is frightening because people have many ways of disowning their choices or even believing that they do make choices. In our culture, people are often taught not to trust their feelings. Too often people are led to believe that trusting in sources outside themselves is better than trusting themselves. We need to pay attention to our feelings and let them guide us. Some people call that their conscience.

The fact that choices are made in a fraction of a second can make it difficult to catch oneself doing it. Thus a choice can be made so fast that a person can believe it just happened. An example is when people get angry and do it so automatically they don't think there was any choice involved. But even with anger, as with any other response, there is always a split second in which there is most definitely a choice made.

### **Homework**

To have full power over eliminating an SDB, you need to fully control choices. The following steps can be followed to help you grasp this power.

1. Recognize that you make inner and outer choices to do your SDB by writing in your homework journal the choices that you have been making to do and maintain your SDB. List some possible alternatives. You must see yourself as a chooser; believe that you can either choose to do your SDB or you can make healthier choices.
2. In a moment of living, catch yourself making the SDB inner choice (your negative label) and be aware of its alternatives. You can become familiar with how you use SDB patterns in specific situations in your life. Journalize your discoveries.
3. Be aware of your relapsing back to the old method of choosing and especially, and most importantly, identify your fears. Journalize what you fear will happen if you were to act without your SDB. Take a few minutes before the day begins or before a reoccurring situation arrives, close your eyes and visualize or imagine yourself in this situation. See yourself responding as your best non-SDB self; see your most integrated self-going down the non-SDB route.
4. Visualizing yourself doing appropriate behavior, before the event, can be of tremendous help when and if you find yourself in the actual situation. You will have already experienced some of the feelings and the new route won't seem so strange when you get there in reality. This is psyching yourself in a positive way so you can be your best self in that moment. Most winning athletes do this just before a contest. Visualization produces winners. You are a winner.

Remember that to live the SDB route, you must disown your best self, your integrated self, and must pay the prices for doing so.

This process of change takes time, and you won't always do it right. The last thing you want to do is to beat yourself up if the changes are not happening as fast as you would like. Don't feel you are an awful person. Remember, only good people take a class like eliminating self-defeating behaviors. You are amazing! You are willing to look inward, to find reasons why you push others away. You want to grow, improve, and move on to better things in your life. This is what good people do. I honor you for enrolling in this class and I love seeing so many people, just like yourself, take the high road to self-improvement.

To receive maximum benefit email your homework to [DrDavidCoombs@gmail.com](mailto:DrDavidCoombs@gmail.com) at least two days before our next session. You do not have to identify yourself. You can remain anonymous. But you will benefit much more as you risk being transparent. Give yourself permission to be human, with both the good and the bad.