

Eliminating Self-Defeating Behaviors - Session Four  
Dr. David Coombs

**Identify the techniques You Use to Keep Your Self-Defeating Behaviors**

As you know, self-defeating behaviors originate at a time of stress, trauma, or anxiety which create powerful fears. I suspect that as you read the previous sentence, painful memories popped into your mind. Write about them in your homework. Remember, you do not have to identify yourself. You may remain anonymous. Journalizing traumatic experiences promotes insight and healing.

Your SDBs are built on your emotionally-laden, past experiences in such a way that you are convinced you cannot cope in life without them. At the time they were initiated, they seemed to be the only logical way to cope with the situation. However, later they became self-defeating.

You maintain them because you are afraid to face the fears that you would feel if you did not have them; they are a crutch. You pay deeply-felt prices to maintain them. You have learned in this workshop that self-defeating behaviors are not something you are but something you do and maintain; they are like a foreign object in your personal system. You use fears from the past to block off the healthy non self-defeating behavior road, and you continue to go down the unhealthy self-defeating behavior route.

As you continue to use your SDB habit, you use outer choices to carry out inner decisions, and you also choose to minimize the prices you pay for doing the self-defeating behavior. You also choose ways to disown the responsibility for doing the behavior. There are various ways to implement these choices and all these ways are what we call techniques.

Techniques are the things you do to carry out defeating choices. Some examples of techniques you might be using include: comparing yourself to others; anticipating certain negative things will happen; distorting feedback; manipulating things and people to maintain the behavior; labeling yourself and others; intellectualizing; pouting; blanking out your mind so that you can't deal with the problem effectively; placing unrealistic expectations on yourself and on others, etc.

Techniques are things we do, the tools with which defeating behavior patterns are realized. Techniques are to the self-defeating behavior what fuel is to the fire--without something to burn, the fire would die out. Without techniques to keep it going, the SDB would cease to exist.

One participant stated, "My self-defeating behavior is like crab grass roots intertwined and intermeshed into my whole life, in the way I think and feel and the things I do, and this workshop is threatening to jerk all that out of me. It will leave a gaping hole," (Wow! Is this ever an example of how our mythical and irrational fears can overwhelm us.) Let's think of it this way, crab grass roots are identifiable and different from other roots. When we come to one stem we will pull it out. When we come to another one, we pull that one out. Just one more little pull of a slim root and the weed is gone, and it does not leave a gaping hole. We take the same approach in eliminating an undesirable behavior with one step at a time. When we control the techniques we use to feed the self-defeating behavior, we have practically won the battle.

You go to great lengths to use techniques--even to create new ones when your old ones become inoperable--because of your growing awareness of them. The object of this lesson is to help you discover the techniques you use and to help you to stop using them.

Look over this list of how others have created their techniques and put a check mark by those you think apply to you.

1. Be argumentative as a way of not getting into more meaningful discussions.
2. Build an invisible wall around yourself, so no one can hurt you. You have been hurt in the past, and you are determined no one will ever get close enough to hurt you again. Your motto is, "I will reject you before you can reject me."
3. Break off a relationship but make it appear the other person is at fault.
4. Begin a number of tasks but don't finish them.
5. Blank out your mind when getting close to important data.
6. Imagine what others are thinking and assume they are thinking the worst.
7. Know something is going on inside of you but keep it vague so you don't have to face it.
8. Avoid eye contact, play shy, so others will leave you alone.
9. Blame something from the past that isn't that bad (like being adopted) as an excuse to avoid facing more serious problems today.
10. Lie to yourself and to others about your true thoughts and feelings.

11. Keep so busy you don't have time to think about yourself and your SDB.
12. Play stupid as a way of avoiding understanding the information presented in this workshop that might lead you to facing your fears.
13. Cry easily, clam up, so you don't have to face deeper issues.
14. Minimize the good aspects of life and over-exaggerate mistakes and challenges of life.
15. Make a mountain out of a molehill.
16. Distort praise and minimize other people's feedback.
17. Convince yourself that most people, if they knew all about you, would not like you.
18. Maintain the idea that it is weak and wrong to ask for help.
19. Maintain guilt for things that one cannot do anything about.
20. Take a reality, such as a spouse's sex interest, and perceive it as something dirty, gluttonous, and excessive.
21. Deny it when a comment touches a painful reality.
22. Take on lots of little tasks to the point of being overwhelmed. Fail to choose between what is important and unimportant in one's life. Be so busy that you cannot build close relationships. Say yes to any and all requests because you desperately want all people to like you.
23. Pick friends or a spouse who will reinforce your SDB.
24. Openly admit using one or more techniques, but do it in such a way that you believe you don't have to change it.
25. Don't ask for certain things you have a right to demand.
26. Tell yourself you have nothing in common with anyone else; therefore, you have nothing to talk about.
27. Forget selectively.
28. Exaggerate a truth.
29. Put on an air of hostility, a scowl, and use a chip on your shoulder to keep others away.
30. Cut yourself down before others do.
31. Be easily distracted from doing important task like studying, doing homework, making important phone calls, or taking the first invitation that comes along to do something else.
32. Don't talk; don't ask questions; don't interact; don't respond.
33. Avoid taking care of yourself; don't eat right; live in disorder; make a shambles of your finances, etc. to prove you are incompetent and need someone to rescue and take care of you.
34. Do a lot irresponsible things and make outrageous comments and perceive them as a mark of personal freedom. "I am known as someone who speaks my mind." or "I am an independent person, and I do what I want."
35. Worry about real problems that cannot be changed.
36. Enroll in a change program (SDB Workshop) with an attitude that the total responsibility for getting anything out of the class is on the instructor's shoulders. "OK teacher, I dare you to make a success out of me."
37. Clearly know what you must do in a given situation but do not trust yourself; frequently ask others for advice. You want someone else to do your thinking for you so you don't have to be responsible for what happens.

Now that you have noted and checked off some of the techniques listed here, make your own list. At the beginning of this session, you were asked to identify the painful experiences in your life that created many of the fears you are living with today. Email your homework at least two days before our next session to [DrDavidCoombs@gmail.com](mailto:DrDavidCoombs@gmail.com). Remember that you do not have to identify yourself. You may remain anonymous. But It is important that you become more transparent with yourself and with me as your instructor.

As you wrestle with journalizing painful memories you may find this quote helpful from an article I found in Psychology Today, (Sills, Judith, PH.D. November/December 2014, 55), in which she describes the pain from our past that interferes with our happiness today. She asks,

"Can we forgive . . .the parent who wasn't there, the ex who betrayed, the boss who humiliated you.

"Or perhaps you're stuck in place by the unhappy residue of your own bad choices--the job you should have left earlier, the sexual secrets you keep, the doctor's visit you delayed. It is heart-

stopingly easy to get stuck in the darkness of bad memories. They are emotional quicksand and exert a strong downward pull on the psyche.

"Sometimes the past traps us through unexamined clutter spilling from every tabletop and corner, elbowing out the new and the possible. Or it commandeers your day-dreams, obsessively replaying old losses, past injustices, nagging guilts about the sibling you tormented or friend you let down.

"Perhaps it lives on in litigation of a marriage although the divorce is a decade old, or in rage against the parent who belittled you, or at yourself because you fell for someone else's lies.

"The strong urge to right wrongs that can never be erased to revisit hurt from which you have been protected, to cling to lost love, to brood, to avenge--these are natural inclinations, to a point and for a time.

"To move forward requires positive action. As we know all too well, without effort, yesterday hangs around on its own."

This SDB workshop could be one of the best things that has happened to you as it gives you the opportunity to redefine the past, to let things go, to forgive self and others and to let go of your self-defeating behaviors. Seize this moment. Work hard, Dig deeper. You will be well rewarded for your efforts to make the changes that will bless your life.

## **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.

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.

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.

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.