

Advice Thinking and Conflict

Where does “should” and “shouldn’t” thinking keep you stuck?

The Work gives us a way to access a more open, creative and effective way of thinking in the places we are stuck or experiencing stress. One common place we can often get stuck in our personal and professional lives is in our relationships with other people: when they don’t agree with us; when they hold opinions we don’t agree with; when they don’t do what we want them to do; when they do things we don’t like or approve of.

Sometimes we can resolve our differences with other people using good communication skills, or by problem solving the issue of conflict. Often relationship struggles are much more complex than this however, and we may find ourselves ongoingly stuck in stress or conflict. Working with our own assumptions and beliefs can be a powerful way to open up fresh perspectives, create new possibilities for resolution, and reduce stress in challenging situations. This can help us to shift our mindset and access new insights that alter the dynamic at play, supporting us to approach the situation from a new direction.

One common place our thinking gets quickly stuck in relationship with other people is in our advice thinking: the “should” and “shouldn’t” thoughts we get attached to when we don’t agree with people or with what is happening. Many of us have learned not to say “should” out loud to people, but it is usually still present in our thinking when we are in conflict or stuck patterns with others.

When you are stressed, angry or triggered by another person you can check to see what ‘advice’ thoughts are running through your mind and write them down in short simple sentences. Don’t be wise or polite in this exercise. Write down your thoughts in the wording you think when you are stressed. While we have learned not to think this way, it can be powerful to see your mind on paper, and to have a tool to access learning and insight, and shift the pattern of thinking.

We do The Work with our advice thinking in order to help ourselves think more clearly and un-hook from our reactions and our attachment to a particular outcome. It doesn’t mean you agree with or condone the person’s behaviour. It simply gives you the opportunity to engage with what is happening in reality with the benefit of an open mind. From that place, you are able to act and communicate more clearly and wisely as needed.

Step 1: IDENTIFY your thoughts.

Make a list. Short simple sentences. Do not censor or be wise. (see over for exercise)

He should listen to me; they shouldn't complain; she should get her work done on time...

Step 2: INQUIRE.

The Four Questions:

Take your “should” or “shouldn’t” belief through each of the Four Questions of The Work.

Turn your advice belief around.

(eg. Belief: He should listen to me)

To the opposite – (He should not listen to me) – What understanding might support this perspective? How might it even be a benefit in some way? (*even if I don't agree...*)

To the “other” - (I should listen to him) – *Why* would that be of benefit? *How* could I do that - or more of it - in this situation?

To yourself – (I should listen to myself) – *Why* would that be of benefit? *How* could I do that - or more of that - in this situation?

The examples you find in your ‘advice’ turnarounds can give you insight, and can also sometimes give you specific ideas about how you can approach the situation in new ways.

The Work

Part 1 - Identify stressful thoughts/limiting beliefs

Advice exercise:

Think of a person you are angry, frustrated or in conflict with.

With the specific person and situation in mind:

What is your uncensored advice for them? *He/she should...* *He/she shouldn't...*

Make a list. Short simple sentences.

Don't hold back or try to be wise or kind.

_____ **should/shouldn't:**

Choose ONE "should" or "shouldn't" belief from your list and do the 4 questions and turnarounds of The Work – in writing or with a facilitator.

Be curious. See what you learn.

(see over for more details about working with 'advice'.)