



# Changing Lenses

Replacing Harmful Beliefs with Beneficial Ones

Our beliefs are like the lenses we see the world through. If someone is wearing glasses with blue lenses, what they see will look different than if they are wearing glasses with yellow lenses. What we see affects how we feel and how we feel affects the decisions we make and the actions we take. Men who abuse women have a belief system that says their wants, needs, and desires are more important than anyone else's. Unfortunately, many women have belief systems that play into the abusers', causing them serious harm.

Our initial belief systems are created in childhood, before we ever know what is happening. Maybe your dad beat your mom when you were a child and that set standards for romantic relationships in your life. Maybe your parents didn't graduate high school and they didn't expect you to either. Maybe you were told over and over again that you were nothing and you eventually started to believe it. On the other hand, maybe your parents stayed together, gave you a stable home, and told you that nothing bad would ever happen to you. That can put you in danger too.

The good news is that we can learn and change! We can replace the harmful beliefs with beneficial ones. The first step to getting to a better place is knowing where you are right now. There is a list of some common limiting beliefs on the next page. Are any of them yours? Take a little while to really think about it. What beliefs do you have about yourself and life that are harming you?



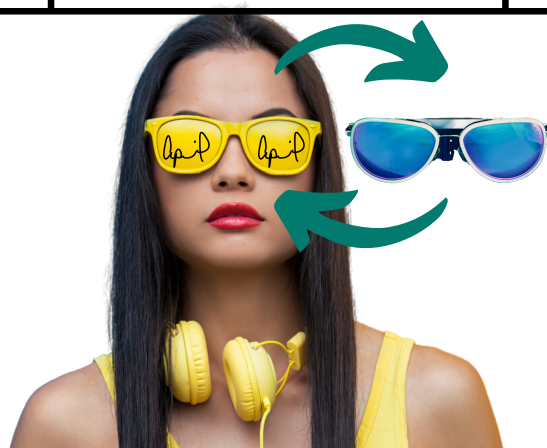
## Some examples of negative beliefs:

- "I'm not enough."
- "There's something wrong with me."
- "Everybody leaves me, one way or another."
- "I always get rejected."
- "I have to be afraid all of the time. It's what keeps me safe."
- "I have to..."
- "I should..."
- "I can't..."
- "I'm stuck"
- "I'm on my own... Nobody else cares about me."
- "I don't belong."
- "I'm not good enough to speak up"
- "I don't matter."
- "I can't do it right."
- "If anyone else is in control, bad things happen."
- "I'm an abuse victim."
- "People say they want to help, but they really just want to hurt me more."
- "I'm powerless."
- "I'm broken."
- "I'm damaged goods."
- "If they really knew me, they would run away."
- "I am weak." (I survived because I'm strong)
- "I am so shameful."
- "I need to hide who I am."
- "I have to hide what I'm dealing with or I'll look like a freak."
- "I'm a victim."
- "I deserved the abuse."
- "My pain doesn't matter."
- "I can't make good decisions anymore."
- "I'm stupid."
- "I'm a perpetual victim."
- "I can't trust anyone."

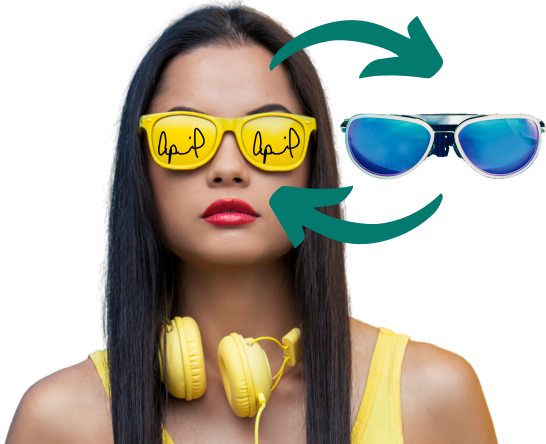


After spending some time thinking about what negative, limiting beliefs you have, use the chart below to process them farther. In the column to the left, write the harmful belief. In the column in the middle, write what that belief tells you about yourself or the world as it relates to you. The column on the right side is for objective, unbiased truths. Be critical about every statement you write here and ask "Is this actually true?" Opinions don't count. It's only things that could be proven or observed, that anyone looking at the situation would universally agree. I've done an example for you.

Harmful Belief	What it Says About Me	Objective Truth
I am weak.	I'm pathetic. I can't handle life. I can't protect myself I'm always going to be abused.	I survived the abuse because I'm strong and my abusers' actions are a reflection of them, not me.



Harmful Belief	What it Says About Me	Objective Truth



Once you uncover the lies from a limiting belief, you can overcome it. This simple three-column strategy is so powerful because it helps dismantle limiting beliefs at their roots. You'll be able to easily see what the belief tells you vs what the truth is. So every time the belief crops up you can say, "Quit lying to me! I know the truth." It'll shrink away as if to say "Oh, okay, I'll be quiet now. Guess I can't trick you anymore." When those false beliefs attempt to sneak up on you again, fight them with the truth.

You won't feel like the truth is true at first, because you don't believe it yet. That's ok. Keep fighting the lies with truths until it does feel real for you.

Say the truth out loud to yourself.

Finally, state a belief that you want to replace each harmful belief you have with.

Harmful Belief	New Belief

Harmful Belief	New Belief



## Here's what this exercise can do.

### A limiting belief that survivors of abuse often live with is some form of "The abuse destroyed my life."

Is it true that your life radically changed because of abuse? Yes, it is. You are going to face (or maybe have already been facing) real limitations that you wouldn't have if it wasn't for that trauma. In fact, I would even say that it's true that you have been changed by it. You will never be 100% the same person you were before the abuse again. Many people also struggle with the idea that they will never get to become the person they would have if not for the trauma. That's true too. But just because there was change doesn't mean it ruined your life. Life is change. And then, life is what we make of it.

Here are some of the things that harmful belief tells you:

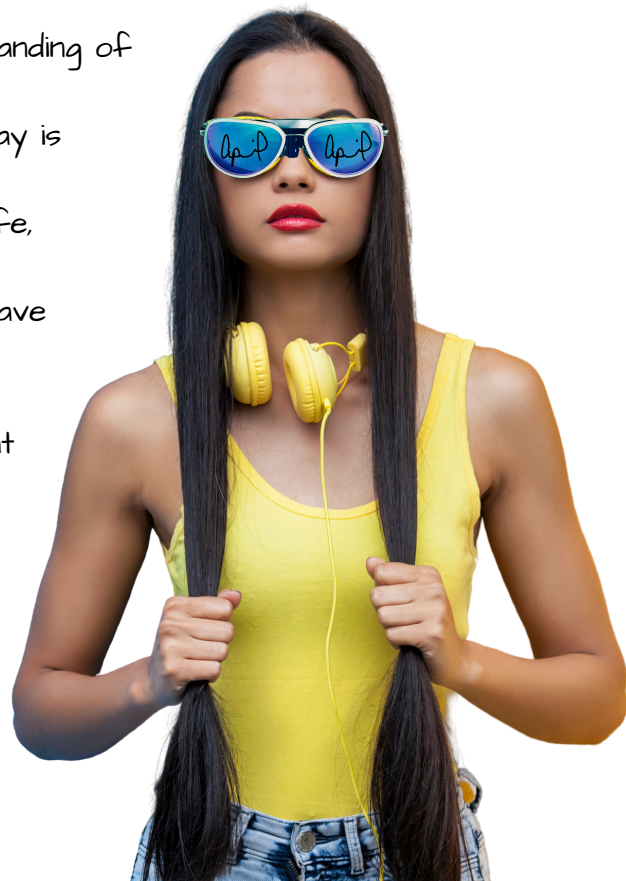
- You have changed and that is all bad.
- Your abuser is the only one with any power in your life. In fact, what your abuser may have done in 20 minutes will keep you powerless for the rest of your life.
- You can't control anything that happens in your life.
- Your abuser took away all of your potential for happiness or a good life.
- You can't do anything to improve your life.

What the objective truth is:

- While no one gets to choose everything that happens in their life, you absolutely have the power to choose how you will respond.
- You can choose to get counseling, join a support group, leave the relationship, etc. or you can choose to let it destroy your life.
- You now have an opportunity to be more understanding of other people's hurts.
- Your abuser caused me hardship, but your life today is more than your past experiences.
- You still have potential for happiness and a good life, it may just take more work because of your past.
- You can improve your life. In fact, you already have in these ways (list them!):

New healthy belief: "I am capable of building a life that I love, even with an abuse history."

If you haven't already,  
do this exercise on your own now!





For Abuse-related Information Visit: [www.aprilhardy.com](http://www.aprilhardy.com)

Email: [staff@aprilhardy.com](mailto:staff@aprilhardy.com)

Join the Conversation!



@aprilhardy01

