

1 1 “should” statements

for you to know

Using the word “should” is appropriate when there is something we need to do or a way we need to act in order to be responsible or courteous. But “shoulds” can get out of control and raise your anxiety level when they are unrealistic or unimportant.

Brandon was frequently anxious because so many of his thoughts used the word “should.” When he was riding the bus to school, he thought, “I should be using this time to study.” When he was at a chess club meeting, he thought, “I should be in a sport instead. It would be so much cooler.” When his bike chain broke and he didn’t know how to fix it, he thought, “I should be more competent and know how to fix this myself.” When he failed a math test because he had gone to a baseball game instead of learning the material, he thought, “I should have studied harder for this test.”

Brandon’s counselor helped him to think more carefully about his “should” statements to see how realistic or important they were. Here is what he discovered about his thoughts:

- “I should be using this time to study.”
I spend several hours on homework each night. My grades are good. Realistically, if I spend every waking moment studying, I will burn out quickly. It is probably healthier to use my time on the bus as a mental break.
- “I should be in a sport instead. It would be so much cooler.”
Some kids think that sports are cooler than chess. But I don’t really like sports and I do like chess. I’m not that good at sports and I’m great at chess. I would rather have fun in the chess club than be miserable in sports just because of what some kids think. My real friends like me no matter what.

activity 11 * “should” statements

- “I should be more competent and know how to fix this myself.”
When I can't do something, I tend to get down on myself. But I am good at a lot of things. I can't know how to do everything. Fixing my bike is something I can just get help with.
- “I should have studied harder for this test.”
This thought is very realistic. I didn't use my time wisely, and I could have done much better if I had taken more time to learn the material.

activity 11 * "should" statements

directions

Make a list of your own "should" statements. After each one, write more detail about how realistic or important they are.

more to do

Tell how your "should" statements are similar to or different from Brandon's.

Tell where most of your "should" statements originated and why you think that is so.

Tell which "should" statement raises your anxiety level the most and why.

Go back to your list and cross out any "should" statements that are unrealistic or unimportant. Put a star next to the statements that are realistic or important. Choose one statement to work on changing, and make a conscious effort to do it in the coming week.