The Psychology Clinic
FARNHAM

IDENTIFYING AND MODIFYING UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS

Underlying assumptions (UA) are rules/assumptions that inform our interpretation of events and subsequent responses. Many of these assumptions are formed in response to certain experiences, particularly childhood experiences when our ideas of the world and others were being shaped. These rules are cross-situational and are applied globally, irrespective of the situation.

Some of these underlying assumptions served us well during childhood however we may find as adults that certain underlying assumptions are outdated and unhelpful, or at the very least need to be applied flexibly. If so, it is helpful to develop a new set of rules.

In order to identify underlying assumptions, it is helpful to use the sentence structure 'If….,then….' For example, "If I communicate my view and it differs from others', then people will not like me".

We have probably identified underlying assumptions that are not serving you in session. Note one of these underlying assumptions below using the if/then sentence structure:

UA =

Note how you typically respond when this underlying assumption is operating:

How is this working currently - what is the typical outcome?

Formulate an alternative underlying assumption that may serve you better:

Alternative UA =

How could you test this alternative UA? Design a behavioural experiment that can test this out. If you have not yet conducted a behavioural experiment, this can be designed in session.

Debrief: Outcome of alternative underlying assumption.