



MODULE FOUR

Coaching with the Root Causes of Self-doubt



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Introduction

In Module Four we are exploring where self-doubt comes from and how it is showing up for the client in the here and now.

Understanding the root causes of self-doubt can help our clients access greater awareness and compassion for themselves, particularly their beliefs and behaviours.

In this Module, we explore the important role of Self-doubt:

- Discover how to uncover the origin stories of the Big Seven Risks and how these feed into your client's Self-doubt.
- Learn how to elicit the biography of your clients (often unconscious) protective beliefs.
- Practice creating space for your client to sit with their 'risk resistance' to see exactly how their beliefs are working as intended.

Consider:

- What is my experience of helping members of my Practice Pod uncover their protective beliefs?
- How might these ideas be incorporated into my client work?
- What is unclear to me?
- What questions do I have?

Self-belief Coaching tools + approaches

The tools and approaches referred to in this Module are available for you to download as unformatted word docs for you to add your own branding.

REF.	NAME	NOTES
SBCAM4A	Life Map	To uncover general themes and patterns that have planted seed of self-doubt.
SBCAM4B	Protective Beliefs	To reveal specific Protective Beliefs – how the client specifically relates to a particular risk.
SBCAM4C	Belief Biography	Explore the source of a particular Protective Belief – ties the Life Map events to the Flavour of Self-doubt.

Coaching the root causes of self-doubt

KEY MESSAGE: Self-doubt has nothing to do with your capability or your destiny and everything to do with how you have learned to keep yourself psychologically safe.

PURPOSE OF THIS MODULE:

In Module One we looked at the Self-doubt Loop and we learned that self-doubt is activated by our sensitivity to one of the Big Seven Risks: rejection, conflict, success, judgement, failure, complexity and disappointment.

The root cause of self-doubt is related to our sensitivity to one of the Big Seven Psychological Risks.

There are three core sources that can create risk sensitivity and activate the client's Self-doubt Alarm:

1. The client's lived experience – self-doubt is almost always tethered to memories of the past. Experiencing any of the Big Seven Risks will have led the client to finding ways to protect themselves.
2. A lack of psychological safety – psychological safety is the sense that it is safe to take manageable risks and to be vulnerable in front of other people. If there is a sense that the client is not 'safe' their self-doubt will be activated.
3. The current context – every situation is different for each person. Self-doubt can be activated when we are completing a new task, when we are in a new environment; extraneous stress can create self-doubt when we are completing tasks we have done many times.

Self-doubt tries to protect us from a particular risk by creating an experience of high discomfort that is always connected to a Protective Belief.

Protective beliefs are often unconscious to the client (probably because they are not '*rational*') and they always make complete sense.

To coach the root causes of Self-doubt, we need to identify the Protective Beliefs.

AIMS OF THIS MODULE:

- To find ways to uncover whatever caused the sensitivity to a particular risk.
- To uncover the client's specific Protective Belief.
- To explore the biography of the Protective Belief.

SBCA Coaching Tool: Learning the client's biography

KEY MESSAGE: Your Self-doubt makes complete sense! It is here for a really well-intentioned reason – to protect you from perceived risk.

The reason we believe something is risky is not without a good reason - understanding this reason can help clients to show themselves compassion and to let go of judging themselves for 'getting in their own way'.

Learning the client's biography helps us to understand three key pieces of information:

1. Experiences and relationships that are possible sources of psychological risk
2. What the client made these experiences mean about themselves, other people, and how the world works
3. How their meaning-making has created Protective Beliefs that underpin their self-doubt.

By understanding the ways our client has made sense of their past experiences and relationships, we can begin to understand the very good reasons why they are sensitive to particular risks.

SOME THINGS TO LISTEN OUT FOR:

Listen for developmental stage: as client's share more of how they make sense of the world, you are likely to start to form an idea of the developmental stage they are in.

Listen for trauma: as trust and rapport develops, you are likely to hear an explanation or at the very least some clues about how and why a client's 'Survivor Self' developed.

When trauma memories are recalled - for example: *"there was a lot of violence at home"* or *"my mother was mentally ill"* - we hear these statements as possibly having an impact in the 'here and now'.

We cannot know the extent of the client's healing and integration work from these disclosures.

Clients may drop little stones like this in the pond to see if coaching is safe. When your Healthy Self receives and responds to this information it becomes clear to the client that you can hold their stories with compassion and empathy.

HOW TO ENCOURAGE THE CLIENT TO SHARE PERSONAL NARRATIVES

As part of your enrolment process:

Here are some examples of questions designed to uncover the potential causes of risk. These will also allow a client with a difficult childhood to tell you about it if they choose:

- Where did you come in terms the birth order in your family?
- Who did you most admire when you were growing up?
- Which parent were you closer to?
- What shaped your values as you were growing up?
- If you had to point to a single experience which had a major impact on you, what would it be?
- How safe did you feel as a child?
- What were your biggest challenges when you were growing up?
- What's your happiest childhood memory?
- What themes and patterns do you see in what you have just described?

First session – setting the goals for coaching:

Use the Self-doubt Archetypes to explore their early experiences:

- What resonated for you about this description?
- Is there anything that was a little difficult to acknowledge?
- What are your hunches or theories about the circumstances that created this part of you that has self-doubt?

Tie the early experiences of your client to the flavour of your coaching: e.g.:
What did you learn from your family about: starting a business? Money?
Your relationship with your body? Conflict?

During the coaching relationship:

It can be so helpful for the client to make the link between what happened in the past with why they are experiencing self-doubt in the here and now.

***Coaching tip:** notice if your clients are only sharing 'good news'. Particularly at the beginning of the coaching relationship, they may not feel safe to share the experiences that they have a lot of mixed feelings about. Often this is because they want to make a good impression (remember if they are at the Forming Self-concept stage, they may not want to risk your judgement). Reassurance is key.*

SBCA Coaching Tool: The Life Map

INTENDED OUTCOMES:

To gain clarity, meaning and perspective over the circumstances, experiences and relationships that planted the seeds of the client's self-doubt.

EVIDENCE-BASED CONTEXT:

The Life Map is adapted from Sugarman (2001). This exercise allows clients to see the most important memories of their life mapped out on a single page.

BENEFITS FOR THE CLIENT:

- Helps clients to understand patterns, themes and taking a wider perspective.
- Aids client to make new meaning of events from the perspective of their Healthy Self.
- Can help remind clients of evidence of their resilience, courage and other resources that would make good companions for current challenges. See that the flow from 'sameness' to 'difference' is a constant.
- I've found that in groups, clients are able to see that any life course is as good as anyone else's. This can offer comfort for clients who have high expectations of themselves.
- This exercise is a way to build to trust with the coach as it allows the client to talk about themselves using the map.

TOP TIPS:

- You can ask your client to do this as homework or go through it in a session.
- It is best if you produce an actual map you can both see (using a whiteboard for online calls is helpful for this – you can always take a photo for the client to have a copy).
- The client may experience self-doubt if they do this on their own.

HOW TO CREATE A LIFE MAP:

- Take a sheet of blank paper and draw a line along the centre of the page. This line represents the timeline of your life.
- Plot all important memories along the timeline - choose any event that feels important to recall. It doesn't have to be big moments - small, quiet realisations are great to capture!
- Plot the events you consider positive, meaningful or joyful above the line. Events you consider negative, sad or regretful go below the line.
- Take a 'Reporters Perspective': write down the events as factually as you can. Try and refrain from judgement or censorship. If it helps: set a timer for 20 minutes.
- For any memories that feel particularly painful or traumatic, you might like to use a code word that allows you to acknowledge that this is part of your story, without dwelling there.
- Let the memories come - ask yourself '*and then what happened?*'
- Don't worry about getting it 'right' the purpose is to stir up your memory cells and get some raw information on the page that we can work with!

COACHING WITH A CLIENT'S LIFE MAP:

The map is a great source of conversation! You can spend a whole session just looking at the themes and patterns that you and your client see.

This is an opportunity to offer Unconditional Positive Regard – offer feedback where you see evidence of self-belief, self-acceptance, self-worth and self-trust.

We are not trying to change anything, or wish it was different (this is a way of helping reassure the client's Protector and Survivor Self that they can be with what is).

Some questions to spark discussion:

- What do the events of your life tell you about your self-doubt?
- What did you make this event mean about you? What did it teach you about how the world works?
- This positive event – tell me about this? What do you remember feeling? What did this teach you about yourself?
- When you went through this (difficult) experience, what do you remember about how you took care of yourself?
- If this was published as a book what would the title be?

EXAMPLE OF LIFE MAP (FROM SAS):



Protective Beliefs

KEY MESSAGE: Your self-doubt is always here for a damn good reason. We make meaning from the experiences and relationships of our lives. Our meaning-making creates our beliefs: about how the world works, and who we need to be, and what we need to do, to belong.

WHAT ARE PROTECTIVE BELIEFS?

Protective Beliefs underpin self-doubt. They create our sensitivity to particular Big Seven psychological risks.

Protective Beliefs are housed in our *implicit memory* - often referred to as unconscious or automatic memory. Implicit memory uses past experience to remember things without thinking about them, no matter how long ago the experiences occurred.

Protective Beliefs:

- May have been inherited from someone close to the client.
- Are personal and subjective to the client.
- May show up more as a felt sense rather than rational thought.
- Can be related to “small-t” traumas that occur when we experience some form of neglect, rejection, betrayal, loss, or engulfment in important relationships.
- Looked after by The Protector (how we characterise self-doubt).
- Create internal dynamic where client feels at war with self. Accelerator and Brake.
- Use absolute language: *‘always never, everyone, no one’*.

THE ACCELERATOR AND THE BRAKE

A helpful analogy is to think of the client’s dreams and goals as the accelerator – they are ready to go! Self-doubt is the brake – it’s saying *‘wait, don’t do that you might hurt yourself’*.

The client has one foot on the accelerator, one foot on the brake, they are going nowhere, feeling stuck in the driveway of their lives.

Protective Beliefs are in the driver’s seat.

If we can help the client to understand these beliefs, they can decide the pace at which they want to ease off the brake.

SBCA Coaching Tool: Uncovering Protective Beliefs

INTENDED OUTCOMES:

To identify the specific Protective Beliefs that underpin the client's Self-doubt. To understand more about why they are sensitive to particular risks.

EVIDENCE-BASED CONTEXT:

This approach is adapted from Kegan + Lahey's *Immunity to Change* model (2009). This exercise allows clients to see how their particular 'accelerator and brake' are operating.

BENEFITS FOR THE CLIENT:

- Helps clients to understand that underneath their self-doubt, is a strongly held belief that is working to protect them from psychological risk.
- Understand how Protective Beliefs resistance is working – this is so strong, so adaptive, and so systemic that it works like a 'finely tuned immune system.'
- We cannot change a Protective Belief without unearthing it and understanding why it's there.
- Changing a Protective Belief expands the self-concept.

While this is effective and fast, it's difficult for the client to do this work on their own. We can't see our own blind spots and Protective Beliefs are often unconscious.

GUIDANCE FOR UNCOVERING A PROTECTIVE BELIEF

MY BIG GOAL:

Action-based goal that the belief is related to – don't overthink this! It's about giving us a 'direction of travel' eg: 'create a thriving business' 'make a positive impact in my new job' 'develop more trust and respect in my relationship'.

I WANT TO GET BETTER AT:	WHAT I'M DOING INSTEAD:	MY WORRY BOX:	MY PROTECTIVE BELIEFS:
Actions you want to start doing and are not currently doing.	What do you do (or not do) instead? Be as SPECIFIC as you can.	If you stopped all the ways you undermine yourself, what might happen?	What protective beliefs lie underneath your worries and behaviours?
Would help you to make progress towards your big goal.	Think 6 P's and how you specifically engage in them (Procrastination, Perfectionism, Proving Yourself, Passive Behaviours, Paralysis, Placating).	What are your worries or fears?	Protective Beliefs are (often unconscious) and explain what you do instead of your goal.
	Describe actions (what you say or do - or don't say and don't do) and not feelings.	What is competing with your big goal?	Your Protective Beliefs are designed to protect you from one of the Big 7 Risks: rejection, conflict, success, judgement, failure, complexity, and disappointment.
	This is courageous work! No need to judge or explain.		

COACHING THROUGH PROTECTIVE BELIEFS:

MY BIG GOAL IS:

- It's important to come up with a **meaningful, action-based goal**.
- If your client offers a more emotional goal, e.g.: *'I want to feel more confident'* - ask questions to come up with the action-based goal. E.g.: *If you were more confident, what would you imagine you would be doing?*
- The accomplishment of this goal should matter to the client and be expressed in words that mean something to them: e.g. - *My goal is to create a sustainable coaching practice that generates £50k of income in 12 months. My goal is to become a better listener to kids.*
- **Example from a client Luke:** *My goal is to become a better listener to kids.*

I WANT TO GET BETTER AT:

- This list should be action-based. Clients will want to tell you what they are doing! We want to know what they are **not yet doing**.
- Positively phrase these actions so you are associating with what you will do – e.g.: instead of I want to be less impatient, write down: *I want to increase my patience.*
- **Example from a Luke:** *I want to get better at being present and giving them my full attention. I want to increase my patience.*

WHAT I'M DOING INSTEAD:

- What they are doing or not doing INSTEAD of what they want to get better at.
- These are the behaviours that are undermining what they want to get better at.
- This is fearless inventory! Let them know how courageous they are by doing this.
- Notice anything vague/unspecific – *'I get impatient'* - encourage them to be really specific.
- **Example from Luke:** *I am uncomfortable with conflict and will avoid it by looking at my phone, making to-do lists in my mind. If it's my oldest kid I will want to tell him what to do, if it's the younger one, I want to comfort him and make it go away.*

MY WORRY BOX

- Slow right down and allow the client to consider this.
- Have a look at column two – ‘**What I’m doing instead**’ and consider: *if I imagine myself trying to do the opposite of this, what is the most uncomfortable or worrying or even scary feeling that comes up for me?*
- It may take a few moments for them to see the way their self-doubt is playing out. There is often an unconscious or hidden dynamic that is protecting them.
- Expect someone to have a reaction – *yuk, eww, that would be horrible!* – these responses are important. We really want them to get into the feeling – not just the thought or the idea. The idea is to vicariously experience a little of the feeling and then put that feeling into words.
- The contents of this column help the client to see that they don’t just have these worries: these worries are driving their behaviours.
- Notice there may be surface answers to begin with – really encourage your clients to go a bit deeper. You want them to name some risk to their self-concept.
- **In our example, Luke’s first answer was:** *‘If I think about giving my full attention and presence, what’s the worst feeling that comes up for me? The first thing is boredom, and the next is impatience. I would have to listen to a lot of stuff that frankly doesn’t matter - their problems seem so petty. I haven’t got time for it’.*
- Note that the boredom and impatience that Luke mentions, are *not* risks. I’ve found that clients will talk about how they feel but don’t name the risk.
- We want to probe a little more: *‘I hear you mention boredom and impatience – that makes sense – how is being bored and impatient a worry for you?’: Sometimes what they say reminds me that they need me to be a better Dad and I worry I am not able to help them – especially the older one. It reminds me of how shitty my own Dad was and I worry that I won’t be any better. And with the younger one – he is so like me – I worry that he is going to screw up because he is so impatient.*
- Then we get to the real worries: of being a rubbish Dad, of being helpless, of potentially repeating his own father’s approach.
- The contents of the Worry Box will be coherent with what they are ‘Doing Instead’. If someone had these worries, they would be doing these things to protect themselves.

MY PROTECTIVE BELIEFS

- The contents of the clients worry box are not the Protective Beliefs – but they are the raw material for them.
- Protective Beliefs represent the fear we have of one of the Big Seven Risks occurring: rejection, conflict, success, judgement, failure, complexity and disappointment.
- PB's are not a passive fear: they actively and effectively protecting us from risk. It's a deep commitment to prevent the thing we are afraid of, from happening.
- PB's are not usually rational – that's one of the reasons we tend to resist them! PB's are often in our 'blind-spot' – we don't know what we don't know.
- To convert worries into protective beliefs, we need to connect them to a Risk and to an Assumption about what might happen if that risk comes true.
- **In our example: what is it about these worries that feels risky to Luke?** *What if I end up failing my boys the way my Dad failed me? He never really cared about my life, never took the time to get to know me, or what mattered to me. And so I never went to him for advice, I still don't. We have a very functional relationship that operates on discussions about his garden and how the country is going to hell.*
- We can hear risks of rejection, disappointment, conflict. What does Luke assume will happen if these risks came true? *I assume that I am a constant disappointment to my kids. I assume that they won't listen to me anyway. I assume that if I feel helpless, there is no way I can help them. I assume that because no one showed me how to do this parenting thing, that I am always getting it wrong.* We start to hear that this big risk is of disappointment – of being disappointing to his sons in the same way he is disappointed by his relationship with his own father.
- I asked Luke to phrase this assumption – to bottom line it – what is at the core of this for him? You might need to generate a few assumptions to get to the heart of things.
- The Protective Belief is often a surprise to the client. But it will contain something real and deep. It will explain everything else in the table. Clients will want to change their PBs pretty much immediately!
- I usually don't attempt to change a Protective Belief in the same session it is uncovered. Instead, I'll encourage the client to sit with this new understanding and to notice how these beliefs are operating in their lives.

LUKE'S UNCOVERED PROTECTIVE BELIEF:

MY BIG GOAL: My goal is to become a better listener to kids.

I WANT TO GET BETTER AT:	WHAT I'M DOING INSTEAD:	MY WORRY BOX:	MY PROTECTIVE BELIEFS:
I want to get better at being present and giving them my full attention. I want to increase my patience.	I am uncomfortable with conflict and will avoid it by looking at my phone, making to-do lists in my mind. If it's my oldest kid I will want to tell him what to do, if it's the younger one, I want to comfort him and make it go away.	I worry about: • being a rubbish Dad • being helpless • giving the wrong advice and enabling someone I love to make a big mistake.	It doesn't matter what I do, I will always be a disappointment as a father. My relationship with my father will always be a disappointment to me.

SBCA Coaching Tool: Exploring a Belief Biography

INTENDED OUTCOMES:

To deepen our understanding of where this belief was formed – to connect this to the wider biography.

EVIDENCE-BASED CONTEXT:

Belief biographies are related to ‘parts work’ of internal family systems, as well as Sugarman (2001) and Keegan and Lahey (2009).

BENEFITS FOR THE CLIENT:

- Helps client to acknowledge and make peace with the circumstances that created their Protective Beliefs.
- Able to see how the PB continues to impact the client. PBs are not related to age, context, or relationship – they can show up everywhere the perceived risk exists.
- Client makes the link between the way they have interpreted past events, when you had much less capacity for perspective, personal resources, the ability to make choices.
- Can mean the client begins to experience less resistance to the belief as it shows up in the here and now.

TOP TIPS:

- You can ask your client to do this as homework after you have revealed their Protective Beliefs.
- This can be particularly helpful if they have a lot of memories come up as a result.

HOW TO CREATE A BELIEF BIOGRAPHY:

- Take a sheet of paper or whiteboard and write the Protective Belief in the centre.
- Brainstorm all the events and relationships that contributed to this belief.

- Take a 'Reporters Perspective': write down the events as factually as you can. Try and refrain from judgement or censorship. If it helps: set a timer for 15-20 minutes.
- You can think about this from an age perspective: *how did this belief shown up in your teens, your 20s etc?*
- Ask from a context perspective: *how did this belief shown up at work? How does it show up in your business?*
- Look at it through the lens of relationships: *does this feel true in your romantic partnership? Your closest friendships?*

COACHING WITH A CLIENT'S BELIEF BIOGRAPHY:

- The Belief Biography is a great source of information! You can spend a whole session just looking at the themes and patterns that you and your client see.
- Much like the wider biography, we are not trying to change anything, or wish it was different (this is a way of helping reassure the client's Survivor Self that they don't need to resort to illusions or denial – they can be with what is).
- This is an opportunity to offer Unconditional Positive Regard – offer feedback where you see evidence of self-belief, self-acceptance, self-worth and self-trust.

EXAMPLE OF A BELIEF BIOGRAPHY (FROM SAS):

During recovery from surgery, pretending to be much better than I was so Mum & Dad wouldn't worry.

Iain would cling to Mum and cry - he didn't want to leave her to go to school (attachment issues anyone?!) So I volunteered to miss my classes and be with him in his class. I did all my school work in the evenings.

Never told Mum & Dad about the extent of the bullying at school. I thought they would blame me for not being more popular.

Dad would be late home, arriving drunk and incapable of taking care of us. On many occasions, I cleaned up his vomit and remade their bed before Mum got home from work. I never told Mum because she was working so hard.

I couldn't believe my boss fancied me! He told me on our second date that he never wanted to travel, or read books, and he couldn't stand 'art'. I married him anyway thinking I could change him.

Worked stupid hours to ensure projects were delivered. I would constantly feel pulled between disappointing leadership and asking too much of my team.

THE WORST THING I CAN
DO IS DISAPPOINT
SOMEONE'

First relationship after ex-husband - he was not ready for anything serious. I stayed with him for two years feeling like I was going mad - I never knew where I stood or if I could trust him. It never occurred to me that I could end it - I didn't want to disappoint him.

Spent six months after Mum died trying not to cry in front of my ex-husband because he said it really upset him.

My boss undermines me at every turn - it is not until he does something illegal that I have the courage to question him. I end up taking a deal to leave rather than have anyone find out how awful he is and be disappointed in him.

Start my coaching practice part-time and try to keep up a full time job. Don't want to disappoint potential clients, day job or husband. Feel wretched.

References

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