

Should and Must Thinking

When we use “should” and “must” thinking, we often tell ourselves phrases like:

- I should always be in control.
- I should be happy.
- Life should be fair.
- I must be successful.
- I must never make mistakes.

We all make mistakes in life. Try not to think that failing at something means you are a failure. Accept that it is OK to fail and make mistakes. Look at what you can learn from the experience that can help you grow.

Accept who you are and the way things are:

- People will let me down at times.
- Life is not always fair.
- I will make mistakes. I will learn from them.

Here are things you can do to change your thinking:

- Look to others. Are they perfect? Do they make mistakes?
- Stop predicting the future. If things are not going well now, it does not mean things will never improve.
- When you are feeling “low”, you may not be at your best. During these times, try not to take on too much or make big decisions.
- Instead of using the word “should”, reframe your thoughts in a more positive way such as, “I wish I had not made that mistake, but I am working hard and accept myself the way I am.”
- Remind yourself about your successes.
- Expect that you will make some mistakes. Try your best to better prepare how to handle a situation when you make a mistake.

Using “should” and “must” too much may be a sign you’re pushing yourself to do things you don’t really want to do. This can cause stress, make you unhappy, and take a toll on your positive relationships with others. Try using “want” or “need” instead of “should” or “must” to see if you are doing things that make you unhappy often. Then you will have a clear choice to make.

Write out a situation where you made a mistake (or where you fear you might make a mistake):

List ways that you could handle the situation differently:

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