

## 2.4 REEVALUATING YOUR "CAN'TS"

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Explain how self-fulfilling prophecies shape the self-concept and influence communication.

### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Complete the following lists by describing communication-related difficulties you have in the following areas.
2. After filling in each blank space, follow the starred instructions that follow the list (\*).

### DIFFICULTIES YOU HAVE COMMUNICATING WITH FAMILY MEMBERS

#### EXAMPLES

I can't *discuss politics with my dad without having an argument* because *he's so set in his ways*.  
I can't *tell my brother how much I love him* because *I'll feel foolish*.

1. I can't \_\_\_\_\_  
because \_\_\_\_\_
2. I can't \_\_\_\_\_  
because \_\_\_\_\_

\* Corrections (see instructions at end of exercise)

### DIFFICULTIES YOU HAVE COMMUNICATING WITH PEOPLE AT SCHOOL OR AT WORK

#### EXAMPLES

I can't *say "no" when my boss asks me to work overtime*  
because *he'll fire me*.

I can't *participate in class discussions even when I know the answers or have a question*  
because *I just freeze up*.

1. I can't \_\_\_\_\_

because \_\_\_\_\_

2. I can't \_\_\_\_\_

because \_\_\_\_\_

\* Corrections (see instructions at end of exercise)

### DIFFICULTIES YOU HAVE COMMUNICATING WITH STRANGERS

#### EXAMPLES

I can't *start a conversation with someone I've never met before*

because *I'll look stupid.*

I can't *ask smokers to move or stop smoking*

because *they'll get mad.*

1. I can't \_\_\_\_\_

because \_\_\_\_\_

2. I can't \_\_\_\_\_

because \_\_\_\_\_

\* Corrections (see instructions at end of exercise)

### DIFFICULTIES YOU HAVE COMMUNICATING WITH FRIENDS

#### EXAMPLES

I can't *find the courage to ask my friend to repay the money he owes me*

because *I'm afraid he'll question our friendship.*

I can't *say no when friends ask me to do favors and I'm busy*

because *I'm afraid they'll think I'm not their friend.*

1. I can't \_\_\_\_\_

because \_\_\_\_\_

2. I can't \_\_\_\_\_  
because \_\_\_\_\_

\* Corrections (see instructions at end of exercise)

### DIFFICULTIES YOU HAVE COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR ROMANTIC PARTNER (PAST OR PRESENT)

#### EXAMPLES

I can't *tell Bill to wear a tie to the party*  
because *he'll laugh at me.*  
I can't *bring up going to visit my parents*  
because *we'll fight.*

1. I can't \_\_\_\_\_  
because \_\_\_\_\_
2. I can't \_\_\_\_\_  
because \_\_\_\_\_

\* Corrections (see instructions at end of exercise)

### PREDICTIONS MADE BY OTHERS

#### EXAMPLES

You'll never amount to anything.      You can't expect much with your background.  
You're just like your father.      The James children never were too bright.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_

\* Corrections (see instructions at end of exercise)

\*After you have completed the list, continue as follows:

- a. Read the list you have made. Actually say each item to yourself and note your feelings.

- b. Now read the list again, but with a slight difference. For each "can't," substitute the word "won't" or "until now I've chosen not to." For instance, "I can't say no to friends' requests" becomes "I won't say no" or "Until now I've chosen not to say no." Circle any statements that are actually "won'ts" or choices.
- c. Read the list for a third time. For this repetition substitute "I don't know how" or "I haven't yet learned to" for your original "can't." Instead of saying "I can't approach strangers," say, "I don't know how to approach strangers." *Correct* your original list to show which statements are truly "don't know how" or "haven't yet learned" statements
- d. For the "Predictions made by others " substitute your strength(s) which makes the prediction untrue (example: "I am my father's child, but I can choose not to repeat behaviors he has that I don't like.").

After completing this exercise, consider how greater awareness of the power that negative self-fulfilling prophecies have on your self-concept and thus on your communication behavior. Imagine how differently you would behave if you eliminated any incorrect uses of the word "can't" from your thinking.