The Tyranny of the Shoulds

You should do this, he should do that! My parents should have done this... I SHOULD DO THAT! Should should should! Now let’s think about “the should”!

**Definition:**

**Verb**
- Used to indicate obligation, duty, or correctness, typically when criticizing someone's actions: "he should have been careful".
- Indicating a desirable or expected state: "by now students should be able to read".

**Synonyms:** shall - must - ought

**My Shoulds**

Make a list of five ‘should’ statements about how you think you ought to be:

1. *I should ____________________________*
2. *I should ____________________________*
3. *I should ____________________________*
4. *I should ____________________________*
5. *I should ____________________________*

**Others Shoulds**

Make a list of five statements about how you think others ought to be:

1. *Other people should ____________________________*
2. *Other people should ____________________________*
3. *Other people should ____________________________*
4. *Other people should ____________________________*
5. *Other people should ____________________________*
Others Shoulds of me!

Make a list of five statements about how other people think you should be:

1. Other people think I should ____________________________________

2. Other people think I should ____________________________________

3. Other people think I should ____________________________________

4. Other people think I should ____________________________________

5. Other people think I should ____________________________________

Action Plan for all the Shoulds in your life:


Counselling Notes: Tyranny of the Shoulds

**Description:** This worksheet is designed to help clients think about their current dysfunctional thinking in terms of what they should be doing and what they should not!

**Theoretical framework:** The Tyranny of the shoulds phrase is attributed to personality theorist Karen Horney ([http://webspace.ship.edu/cgboer/horney.html](http://webspace.ship.edu/cgboer/horney.html))

**Ages:** 10+ years.

**Ideas for use:**
- Talk about the word “should” with the client.
- Work through the worksheet with the client and explore the statements with the clients.
- After the ‘shoulds’ have been explored – gently challenge the clients thinks. Why should they?

**Possible Counselling questions:**
- How could you replace the should with “could”? or maybe “I should?”

**Other worksheets to explore in this series:**

**Further reading:**