A Guide to Mind Traps

The Blame Trap

We get caught in the blame trap when we refuse to take responsibility for our decisions and our actions. Instead we try to make others responsible. The thoughts sound like:
‘He’s making me really grumpy’, ‘She made me do it’, ‘It’s not my fault I lapsed, he’s the one who brought the gear home’ and ‘It’s your fault things are not working out between us’

Challenge with:
‘I am responsible for my feelings and my actions. Blaming others keep me from having to look at my role. I may have an emotional reaction to someone’s behaviour, but I am responsible for how I respond. Others may ask me to do things, or offer me opportunities, but no one is responsible for my decisions except me.’

The Helpless Trap

We get caught in the helpless trap when we think and act like we are victims of circumstance and there is nothing we can do to solve our problems. The thoughts sound like:
‘I can’t handle this hassle’, ‘There’s nothing I can do about all these problems’ and ‘I’ll never be able to get out of this mess’

Challenge with:
‘I am capable. I can handle this. I can work something out. There is no good reason why I can’t manage this situation, even if it is scary and difficult. The solution will take time, effort, patience and hard work and I’m up to it.’

The Catastrophe Trap

We get caught in the catastrophe trap when we exaggerate even our smallest woes, turning them into major crises. In another version of this trap, we convince ourselves that everything we attempt to do will be doomed to failure or catastrophe. The thoughts sound like:
‘I can’t cope with this, it’s just far too much!’, ‘I’ll never get over this’ and ‘There’s no way I can change, so why bother trying’
Challenge with:
‘What has happened is unfortunate (or annoying, irritating, unpleasant or frustrating), but it is not the end of the world. I don’t like it, but I can handle it. I know this will pass with time. On a scale of one to ten, how large is this problem really? What are my options for handling this problem? Just because I’ve been disappointed in the past doesn’t mean I can never succeed. If I don’t at least try, I’ll never know what I could have achieved’.

The Guilt Trap

We get caught in the guilt trap when we have thoughts that are unfairly harsh and critical about ourselves. We may think we are responsible for external events or for other people’s feelings and actions. Or we may think anything we do that is short of perfection makes us a bad person. The thoughts sound like:
‘I should have done a better job’, ‘If I were a better person I’d call my mother more often’, ‘It’s my fault my husband is so unhappy’ and ‘I’m so stupid! I should have remembered my appointment’.

Challenge with:
‘I am a human being. Human beings make mistakes and are not perfect. I am not obliged to be perfect, only to do the best I can. I will not call myself harsh, critical names, instead I will say, I’m imperfect and I make mistakes, just like everyone else. I am not responsible for everything that goes wrong.’

The All or Nothing Trap

We get caught in the all or nothing trap when we overreact to people or events by assuming they are totally one way or another. We label things as good/bad, black/white, yes/no, success/failure and either/or, and ignore the full range of possibilities in between. The thoughts sound like:
‘He’s always late’, ‘She never gets it right’, ‘I’m always in a hurry’, and ‘the whole dinner is ruined because I burned the rolls’.

Challenge with:
‘Am I being honest? Am I being fair? Am I overreacting? I know he is often late, but that’s different than always. I know she sometimes makes mistakes, but that’s different to never getting it right. Just because one thing is not quite right, doesn’t mean the whole thing is wrong.’