A list of common, sub-conscious irrational beliefs
Based on the work of Albert Ellis who developed Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy

1. I must do well and get the approval of everybody who matters to me / or I will be a worthless person.

2. Other people must treat me kindly and fairly / or else they are bad.

3. I must have an easy, enjoyable life / or I cannot enjoy living at all.

4. All the people who matter to me must love me and approve of me / or it will be awful.

5. I must be a high achiever / or I will be worthless.

6. Nobody should ever behave badly / and if they do, they must be condemned.

7. I mustn't be frustrated in getting what I want / and if I am it will be terrible.

8. When things are tough and I am under pressure / I must be miserable and there is nothing I can do about this.

9. When faced with the possibility of something frightening or dangerous happening to me / I must obsess about it and make frantic efforts to avoid it.

10. I can avoid my responsibilities and dealing with life's difficulties / and still be fulfilled.

11. My past is the most important part of my life / and it will keep on dictating how I feel and what I do.

12. Everybody and everything should be better than they are / and, if they're not, it's awful.

13. / I can be as happy as is possible by doing as little as I can and by just enjoying myself.

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Common sources of irrationality and emotional distress in the above statements, according to Ellis, are:

- The demand that I or others “must” or “should” be seen in a certain way or act in a certain way.
- The consequences (after the “/”) I foresee for failing to live up to “musts” or “shoulds.”

Example: “I must do well and get the approval of everybody who matters to me / or I will be a worthless person.”

He would say that while it would be pleasant to do well and get everyone's approval, this is an impossibility and seeing it as a “must” is irrational as is the notion that if I don't get everyone's approval I must be worthless.

He suggests we learn to dispute these statements e.g. “Who says I 'must' impress everybody? Who says I'm worthless if I don't?”

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