

## **Six (6) Common Core Negative Self-Meanings Clinical Reference for Therapists**

### **1. “I am worthless / I don’t matter.”**

#### Developmental origin:

Early caregivers were emotionally unavailable, depressed, preoccupied, or inconsistent. The child’s bids for contact, comfort, delight, or recognition were met with neutrality, distraction, or absence rather than overt abuse.

#### How the Self-Meaning formed:

Not being felt by caregivers became encoded as not being worth feeling for. Over time, absence of response was internalized as absence of value.

#### Adult presentation:

Chronic emptiness, invisibility in relationships, difficulty receiving care, confusion about personal needs.

### **2. “I am bad / something is wrong with me.”**

#### Developmental origin:

The child was frequently criticized, shamed, blamed, or scapegoated—often for developmentally normal emotions and behaviors.

#### How the meaning formed:

To preserve attachment, the child concluded, “If my caregivers are right and good, then I must be the problem.”

#### Adult presentation:

Pervasive shame, harsh inner critic, self-punishment, feeling defective even when successful.

### **3. “I am too much.”**

#### Developmental origin:

Caregivers were emotionally overwhelmed, dysregulated, ill, or stressed. The child’s emotions were met with overwhelm, irritation, withdrawal, or pressure to be easier.

#### How the meaning formed:

The child learned that having needs or emotions disrupted connection—so aliveness itself became dangerous.

#### Adult presentation:

Emotional constriction, fear of burdening others, withholding self-expression, apologizing for feelings, difficulty expressing joy or pain fully.

#### **4. “I am not enough.”**

Developmental origin:

Love and approval were conditional—based on performance, achievement, appearance, or compliance.

How the meaning formed:

The child internalized the understanding that their being was insufficient and must be supplemented by over-compensation.

Adult presentation:

Perfectionism, chronic striving, impostor syndrome, anxiety around evaluation, inability to rest.

#### **5. “I am unlovable.”**

Developmental origin:

Early experiences of rejection, abandonment, emotional coldness, or inconsistent attachment figures.

How the meaning formed:

The child concluded that closeness disappears because they themselves are inherently unlovable.

Adult presentation:

Fear of intimacy, hypervigilance to rejection, clinging or distancing patterns, expectation that love will end.

#### **6. “I am unsafe / the world is not safe.”**

Developmental origin:

Exposure to chronic unpredictability, emotional volatility, abuse, neglect, or lack of protection.

How the meaning formed:

Without a stable external regulator, the nervous system encoded danger as the default state.

Adult presentation:

Chronic anxiety, hyperarousal or shutdown, control strategies, difficulty trusting or relaxing.