

# COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

## A HELPFUL LIST OF THINKING ERRORS

- 1. All-or-Nothing Thinking:** Viewing situations on one extreme or another instead of on a continuum. Ex. "If my child does bad things, it's because I'm a bad parent."
- 2. Catastrophizing:** Predicting only negative outcomes for the future. Ex. "If I fail, my life will be over."
- 3. Disqualifying or discounting the positive:** Telling yourself that the good things that happen to you don't count. Ex. "My daughter told her friend that I was the best mom in the world, but I'm sure she was just being nice."
- 4. Emotional Reasoning:** Letting one's feeling about something overrule facts to the contrary. Ex. "Even though Steve is here at work late every day, I know I work hard than anyone else at my job."
- 5. Labeling:** Giving someone or something a label without finding out more about it/them. Ex. "My daughter would never do anything I disapprove of."
- 6. Magnification/Minimization:** Emphasizing the negative or playing down the positive of a situation. Ex. "My professor said he made some corrections on my paper, so I know I'll probably fail the class."
- 7. Mental Filter/Tunnel Vision:** Placing all one's attention on, or seeing only the negatives of a situation. Ex. My husband says he wishes I was better at housekeeping, so I must be a lousy wife."

# COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

## A HELPFUL LIST OF THINKING ERRORS

- 1. All-or-Nothing Thinking:** Viewing situations on one extreme or another instead of on a continuum. Ex. "If my child does bad things, it's because I'm a bad parent."
- 2. Catastrophizing:** Predicting only negative outcomes for the future. Ex. "If I fail, my life will be over."
- 3. Disqualifying or discounting the positive:** Telling yourself that the good things that happen to you don't count. Ex. "My daughter told her friend that I was the best mom in the world, but I'm sure she was just being nice."
- 4. Emotional Reasoning:** Letting one's feeling about something overrule facts to the contrary. Ex. "Even though Steve is here at work late every day, I know I work hard than anyone else at my job."
- 5. Labeling:** Giving someone or something a label without finding out more about it/them. Ex. "My daughter would never do anything I disapprove of."
- 6. Magnification/Minimization:** Emphasizing the negative or playing down the positive of a situation. Ex. "My professor said he made some corrections on my paper, so I know I'll probably fail the class."
- 7. Mental Filter/Tunnel Vision:** Placing all one's attention on, or seeing only the negatives of a situation. Ex. My husband says he wishes I was better at housekeeping, so I must be a lousy wife."

**8. Mind Reading:** Believing you know what others are thinking. Ex. My house was dirty when my friends came over, so I know they think I'm a slob."

**9. Overgeneralization:** Making an overall negative conclusion beyond the current situation. Ex. "My husband didn't kiss me when he came home this evening. Maybe he doesn't love me anymore."

**10. Personalization:** Thinking the negative behavior of others has something to do with you. Ex. "My daughter has been pretty quiet lately. I wonder what I did to upset her."

**11. Shoulds:** Interpreting events in terms of how things should be rather than simply focusing on what is. Ex. "I should do well. If I don't, then I'm a failure."

**12. Personalizing:** Attributing a disproportionate amount of blame for negative events to yourself and failing to see that certain events are also caused by others. Ex. "My marriage ended because I failed."

**13. Blaming:** Focusing on the other person as the source of your negative feelings and refusing to take responsibility for changing yourself. Ex. "She's to blame for the way I feel now."

**14. Unfair Comparison:** Interpreting events in terms of standards that are unrealistic by focusing primarily on other who do better than you and then judging yourself inferior in comparison. Ex. "She's more successful than I am."

**15. Regret Orientation:** Focusing on the idea that you could have done better in the past, rather than on what you could do better now. Ex. "I could have had a better job if I had tried."

**16. What If?:** Asking a series of questions about "what if" something happens, and never being satisfied with any of the answers. Ex. "Yeah but, what if I get anxious?"

**17. Fortune Telling:** Predicting the future-that things will get worse. Ex. "I won't get the job."

# WAYS TO UNTWIST YOUR THINKING

## **Identify the Distortions**

Write down the distortion in each negative thought.

## **The Straightforward Approach**

Substitute a more positive and realistic thought.

## **The Cost-Benefit Analysis**

List the advantages and disadvantages of a negative feeling, thought, belief or behavior.

## **Examine the Evidence**

Instead of assuming that a negative thought is true, examine the actual evidence for it.

## **The Survey Method**

Do a survey to find out if your thoughts and attitudes are realistic.

## **The Experimental Method**

Do an experiment to test the accuracy of your negative thought.

## **The Double-Standard Technique**

Talk to yourself in the same compassionate way you might talk to a dear friend who was upset.

## **The Pleasure-Predicting Method**

Predict how satisfying activities will be, from 0% to 100% and record how satisfying they turn out to be.

## **The Vertical Arrow Technique**

Draw a vertical arrow under your negative thought and ask why it would be upsetting if it was true.

## **Thinking in Shades of Gray**

Instead of thinking about your problems in black-and-white categories, evaluate things in shades of gray.

## **Define Terms**

When you label yourself as 'inferior' or 'a loser' ask yourself what you mean by those labels.

## **Be Specific**

Stick with reality and avoid judgements about reality.

## **The Semantic Method**

Substitute language that is less emotionally loaded for "should" statements and labeling

## **Reattribution**

Instead of blaming yourself for a problem, think about all the factors that may have contributed.

## **The Acceptance Paradox**

Instead of defending yourself against your own self-criticisms, find the truth in them and accept them.



Source: [www.cognitivetherapymd.com/links](http://www.cognitivetherapymd.com/links)