

Cognitive Distortions For Teens



Mind Reading: You assume you know what people thinking without having evidence or proof of their thoughts. “He thinks I’m an idiot.” “I’m not going to make the team”

Future-Telling: You predict the future – that things will get worse or that there’s danger ahead. “If I go, people will make fun of me.” “If I talk, I will mess up and not say what I mean.”



Catastrophizing: You believe what might happen will be so awful and unbearable that you won’t be able to stand it. “It would be terrible if I failed.” “If I make a bad grade then I will never get into a good college.”

Labeling: You assign general negative traits to yourself and others. “I’m disgusting.” “He’s horrible.” “She’s irrelevant.”



Discounting Positives: You claim that the positives that you or others have don’t matter. “That’s what I’m supposed to do, so it doesn’t count.” “Those successes were easy so they don’t matter.”

Negative Filter: You focus almost exclusively on the negatives and seldom notice the positives. “Look at all the terrible things on the news.” “Girls never have anything nice to say.”



Overgeneralizing: You perceive the likelihood of a negative outcome based upon a single incident. “I fail all the time.”



All-or-None Thinking: You view events or people in all-or-none/black-and-white terms. “It was a waste of time.” “I get rejected by everyone.” “Nothing ever goes my way.”



Shoulds: You interpret events in terms of how things should be rather than simply focusing on what is. “I should do well; if I don’t, I’m a failure.”



Personalizing: You attribute a most of the blame to yourself for negative events and fail to see that certain situations are also caused by others. “My relationship ended because I wasn’t fun enough.” “It was my fault my group got a bad grade.”



Blaming: You focus on the other person as the source of your negative feelings and refuse to take responsibility for changing yourself. “She’s to blame for the way I feel.” “My parents caused all my problems.” “My teacher is the reason I’m not doing well.”



Judgment Focus: You view yourself, others, and events in terms of evaluations of “good” and “bad” or “right” and “wrong” rather than simply describing, accepting, or understanding. “I didn’t perform well.” “I tried it, and I just kept doing it wrong.” “Look how successful she is, I’m not that successful.”

Regret Orientation: You focus on the idea that you could have done better in the past, rather than on what you can do better now. “I could have had a better job if I had tried harder.” “I shouldn’t have said that.” “I always mess up.”



What if: You keep asking a series of questions about what if something happens, and fail to be satisfied with any of the answers. “Yeah, but what if I get anxious, and I can’t catch my breath.”

Emotional Reasoning: You let your feelings guide your interpretation of reality. “I feel sad, therefore I must be depressed.” “I feel anxious, therefore I must be in danger.”



Inability to Disconfirm: You reject any evidence or arguments that might contradict your negative thoughts. “I’m unlovable – my friends hang out with me only because they must feel sorry for me.” “I’m a bad person – I only help others because it makes me feel better about myself.”

Unfair Comparisons: You interpret events in terms of standards that are unrealistic. “Others did better than I did on the test.” “People my age are more successful than I am.”

