

Cognitive Distortions



City Center Psychotherapy

All or Nothing Thinking

You see things in black and white categories. If your performance falls short of perfect, you see yourself as a total failure

Mental Filter

You pick out a single negative detail and dwell on it exclusively so that your vision of all reality becomes darkened, like a drop of ink that discolors the entire beaker of water.

Magnification (Catastrophizing) or Minimization

You exaggerate the importance of things (such as your goof-up or someone else's achievement) or you inappropriately shrink things until they appear tiny (your own desirable qualities or the other fellow's imperfections). This is also called the "binocular trick."

Personalization

You see yourself as the cause of some negative external event which in fact you were not primarily responsible for.

Disqualifying the Positive

You reject positive experiences by insisting they "don't count" for some reason or another. In this way you can maintain a negative belief that is contradicted by your everyday experiences.

Should Statements

You try to motivate yourself with shoulds and shouldn't, as if you had to be whipped and punished before you could be expected to do anything. "Musts" and "oughts" are also offenders. The emotional consequence is guilt. When you direct should statements toward others, you feel anger, frustration, and resentment.

Labeling and Mislabeled

This is an extreme form of overgeneralization. Instead of describing your error, you attach a negative label to yourself: "I'm a loser." When someone else's behavior rubs you the wrong way, you attach a negative label to him: "He's a louse." Mislabeled involves describing an event with language that is highly colored and emotionally loaded.

Overgeneralizing

You see a single negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat.

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Jumping to Conclusions

You make a negative interpretation even though there are no definite facts that convincingly support your conclusion.

Mind Reading:

You arbitrarily conclude that someone is reacting negatively to you, but you don't bother to check this out.

Fortune Telling:

You anticipate that things will turn out badly, and you feel convinced that your prediction is already an established fact.

Emotional Reasoning

You assume that your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are: "I feel it, therefore it must be true."

Compiled from From Feeling Good, by David D. Burns, M.D. and Thinking Errors by Jonathan Abramowitz

Intolerance of Uncertainty

You feel as if you must have a 100% guarantee of safety or absolute certainty. Any hint of doubt, ambiguity, or the possibility of a negative outcome (however small) is unacceptable.

Significance of Thoughts

You believe that your negative thoughts are overly important or very meaningful. For example, the idea that there is something seriously wrong with your brain because you have senseless thoughts.

Moral Thought-Action Fusion:

You believe that your thoughts are morally equivalent to performing a terrible action. Therefore, you think you are an awful, immoral, or disgraceful person for thinking these thoughts.

Likelihood Thought-Action Fusion:

You believe that thinking certain thoughts increases the chance that something terrible will happen. For example, "If I think about death, someone will die."