

Black & White Thinking

What is it?

- Common cognitive distortion or thinking error
- Leads to problematic emotions and actions
- Also known as all-or-nothing thinking

What is the error

- Involves categorizing situations, people & things in mutually exclusive categories
- Makes us erroneously judge situations, people & things in extreme dichotomies without any shades of gray or nuance
- A decision may be seen as bad or good, effort as enough or waste, outcome as success or failure and relationship as ideal or horrible

Examples

- "If I am not in the top then I am a failure"
- "My boyfriend is horrible He forgot my birthday!"
- "If she cannot get this done, she's totally incompetent"
- "If my relationship isn't ideal, its shitty"
- "There's no point doing things if not perfectly"

Why is it problematic?

- It affects our decisions, judgments & actions
- Leads to self sabotaging behaviours as procrastination & perfectionism
- Disrupts motivation, impacts consistency & limits progress
- Leads to misinterpretation, misunderstanding & conflict resolution in relationship
- Causes idealizing and devaluing people creating upheaval in relationships

Black & White Thinking

In the table below, write down various aspects of your life E.g. Relationship with mom, art project, singing skills, weight loss, career performance etc. Define what “black” and “white” for this category is. Black is the absolute zero and white is perfect. Mark where your reality stands on this scale. Repeat this for a reality check.

