

Fear comes in many forms, the nature of fearful self-talk is often the same.

1. Overestimating the Negative Outcome

Overestimating the odds of something bad happening is one type of distortion. Most of the time your worries consist of “what-if statements” that overestimate a particular negative outcome.

2. Catastrophizing

The second distortion is thinking that if a negative outcome did occur, it would be catastrophic, overwhelming, and unmanageable.

3. Understanding Your Ability to Cope

The third distortion is not recognizing or acknowledging your ability to cope if a negative outcome did, in fact, occur. This underestimation of your ability to cope is usually implicit in your catastrophic thoughts.

If you take any fear and examine the negative thinking that contributes to maintaining that fear, you’ll probably find these three distortions. To the extent that you can overcome them with more reality-based thinking, the fear will tend to drop away. In essence, you can define fear as the unreasonable overestimation of some threat, coupled with an underestimation of your ability to cope.

What to do to weaken the hold on your negative self-statements:

1. What is the evidence for this?
2. Is this *always* true?
3. Has this been true in the past?
4. What are the odds of this really happening (or being true)?
5. What is the very worst that could happen? What is so bad about that? What would you do if the worst happened?
6. Are you looking at the whole picture?
7. Are you being fully objective?

The validity of your negative self-statements has nothing to do with how attached you are to them or how ingrained they might be. Rather, it has to do with whether they stand up under careful, objective scrutiny.