NEGATIVE THOUGHTS TRIGGER NEGATIVE FEELINGS

We used to believe that it was depression or anxiety that made people think negatively, but psychologists and psychiatrists have discovered that most people who struggle with anxious or depressed feelings first had negative, pessimistic, distorted thoughts that produced those feelings. People often have completely different reactions to the same situation.

For example, John and Jack both heard their supervisor say to their production group, "We have to work harder and be more productive. Too much time is being wasted on trivial matters and we need to get focused." John thinks, "The supervisor is trying to increase production and make us more efficient. I'd better do my part." But Jack thinks, "The supervisor is blaming me for our low productivity numbers. I'm worried that I'm going to get fired. He never did like me." Jack returns to work feeling depressed and anxious and his preoccupation with these negative feelings reduces his productivity. John, after hearing the same statement from the supervisor, returns to work more focused and confident that the situation can improve.

The thoughts and interpretations that you make regarding a circumstance have a very strong influence on the feelings that are generated. Psychologists have identified several negative thinking patterns that are common to people who struggle with feelings of anxiety and depression. These distorted thinking patterns trigger the negative feelings and can lead to chronic states of depression and anxiety.

1. Study the following list of the types of negative thinking patterns that have been identified and defined. These distorted thinking patterns are common to people who suffer from depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem.

DISTORTED THINKING

Type	Definition	Example
Black or white	Viewing situations, people, or self as entirely bad or entirely good—nothing in between.	When Mary brought her vegetable salad to the neighborhood potluck, a hostess commented, "That's our third salad." Mary immediately thought, "She's criticizing me. She doesn't like me."
Exaggerating	Making self-critical or other-critical statements that include terms like *never, nothing, everything,* or *always.*	Jack was accidentally overlooked when coworkers joined to make plans for lunch together. Jack thought, "They never ask me to do anything. Nobody wants me around here."

Type	Definition	Example
Filtering	Ignoring the positive things that occur to and around self but focusing on and accentuating the negative.	Kate had her hair cut short and styled differently. After receiving several compliments from friends and family, one person was mildly critical. Kate thought, “I knew I shouldn’t have gotten it cut short. I look like a freak. People are laughing at me.”
Discounting	Rejecting positive experiences as not being important or meaningful.	Tyler was complimented by his boss for his good work on a project. He thought, “Anybody could have done that. She doesn’t know anything about this project and I didn’t do anything special with it.”
Catastrophizing	Blowing expected consequences out of proportion in a negative direction.	The teacher told Mary that her son was struggling a bit with math. Mary thought, “This is awful. Johnny is going to fail. I knew I should have worked with him more.”
Judging	Being critical of self or others with a heavy emphasis on the use of *should have, ought to, must, have to,* and *should not have.*	Jill made a sales presentation to a client. The client was very attentive and made comments about being impressed with the product. Jill thought, “He knows I stumbled over my words. I should have been more prepared. I have to be more relaxed or no client will ever buy from me.”
Mind reading	Making negative assumptions regarding other people’s thoughts and motives.	Aaron inquired about a transfer to a new department. When he was told the position was already filled, he thought, “This manager never did like me. He knew I wanted that position but he just ignored me.”

Type	Definition	Example
Forecasting	Predicting events will turn out badly.	Kelly just finished an important job interview. She immediately predicted that she would not get hired. “I’ll never get this job. That interview was awful and I’m sure I blew it,” she thought.
Feelings are facts	Because you feel a certain way, reality is seen as fitting that feeling.	Jim did not have plans for activity with any friends for the weekend. He felt lonely and inferior. He thought, “No one likes me. I have a terrible personality.”
Labeling	Calling self or others a bad name when displeased with a behavior.	Joan had a disagreement with her friend about where to meet for lunch. Joan thought, “Betty is such a controller. She never listens to anyone and insists on always getting her own way.”
Self-blaming	Holding self responsible for an outcome that was not completely under one’s control.	Paula’s friend had a minor traffic accident while she and Paula were riding to the mall. Paula thought, “This accident was my fault. I should not have been talking to Jackie while we were driving. Even though that other car hit us, I’m sure Jackie could have avoided it if I would have kept my mouth shut.”

2. Apply these 11 common types of distorted thinking to your own way of thinking. List at least three examples of your own thoughts that lead you to feeling depressed and anxious. First, describe the event that prompted you to feel depressed or anxious and then describe the thoughts that promoted the bad feelings.

What Happened?	Negative Thoughts You Had
A. _____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
B. _____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

C. _____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

D. _____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

3. It is important to try to replace negative, distorted thoughts with positive, more realistic thoughts that can help you feel happier. Refer to each of your examples listed in 2 and write a positive thought that you could have used to make you feel better.

What Happened?	**Replacement Positive Thoughts**
A. _____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
B. _____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
C. _____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
D. _____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____