



Distorted Thinking Patterns by David Burns MD

1. **All-or-nothing thinking:** You look at things in absolute, black and white categories.
Example: if your performance falls short of perfect, you see yourself as a total failure.
Coping Skill: Learn to use a continuum for evaluating, realizing that absolutes do not exist in this universe.

2. **Overgeneralization:** You view negative events as a never-ending pattern of defeat—if it's true in this case, it's always true.
Example: After being turned down for a date, a young man concludes: "I'm never going to get a date. No girl would ever want to go out with me. I'll be alone and miserable for the rest of my life!"
Coping Skill: Evaluate for similarities and differences.

3. **Mental filter:** You dwell on the negatives and ignore the positives, perceiving that the whole situation is negative.
Example: You overhear someone making fun of your best friend and conclude that that's what the entire human race is like: cruel and insensitive.
Coping Skill: Remember times when you overheard someone talking positive about someone—it happens!!

4. **Discounting the positives:** You insist that accomplishments or positive qualities don't count, assuming that the worst will happen.
Example: You make a mistake and conclude that your reputation is ruined.
Coping Skill: Calculate the probability that the worst will happen. What is the evidence that it won't?

5. **Jumping to conclusions:** You conclude things are bad without any definite evidence.
Example:
 - a) **Mind reading:** You assume people are reacting negatively to you.
 - b) **Fortune telling:** You predict that things will turn out badly.**Coping Skill:** Look for evidence to support or refute the assumption or prediction.

6. **Magnification or minimization:** You blow things way out of proportion or you shrink their importance, where positive events "count" less and negative events "count" more.
Example: You feel inferior after a mistake.
Coping Skill: Identify all parts of a given situation, the positive, negative and neutral.

7. **Emotional reasoning:** You assume that your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are. "I feel it, therefore it must be true."
Example: A depressed person thinks, "I feel overwhelmed and hopeless, therefore, my problems must be impossible to solve!"
Coping Skills: Separate objective facts from emotional beliefs.



8. **“Should” statements:** You criticize and judge yourself or other people with “shoulds,” “shouldn’ts,” “musts,” “oughts,” and “have tos.”
Example: Your doctor is running behind schedule and is late to your appointment. You think, “He shouldn’t be so thoughtless! He ought to be prompt!”
Coping Skill: Recognize that should statements represent preferences instead of vital needs.

9. **Labeling:** You use labels or extreme emotional terms in describing yourself, events or others.
Example: Instead of saying, “I made a mistake,” you tell yourself, “I’m a jerk” or “a loser.”
Coping Skill: Separate objective facts from emotional beliefs and define terms.

10. **Blame:** You blame yourself for something you weren’t entirely responsible for, or you blame other people and overlook ways that you contributed to a problem.
Example: When a parent saw their child’s report card, there was a note from the teacher stating that the child is not working well. The parent automatically decides: “I must be a bad parent! I’ve failed as a parent!” OR
The electric bill is overdue, and when your spouse asks you about it, you say, “You didn’t remind me to take care of it!”
Coping Skill: Identify all parts of a given situation, the positive, negative and neutral, along with outside factors that influenced the outcome.