

Feelings are not Facts!

Identifying Cognitive Distortions: Distorted Thoughts Inventory

Check the items below to identify patterns in your thinking that may be distorted, twisted and therefore, untrue. (Adapted from David Burns MD Distorted Thoughts Inventory)

- 1. Filtering—Focus only on the negative.** *One criticism overshadows 100 compliments.*
- 2. Polarized thinking--“Black and White” or “All or Nothing” thinking.** No middle, no balance. *Always/Never. Perfect or fail. Give 100% or give up. Change everything or change nothing.*
- 3. Overgeneralizing.** *If something bad happens only once, you expect it to happen over and over again. Experience one defeat then believe the whole day, week, month, year or even your whole life is ruined.*
- 4. Drama/ Catastrophizing** *I'll die of embarrassment! You are killing me! The sky is falling!*
- 5. Taking things personally.** Thinking it is all about you. *“I must have done something to cause this” “If you loved me, you would not do that!” “This has to be my fault.”*
- 6. Blame fallacy: “You made me feel this way!”** *Other people are responsible for my feelings, they cause my feelings. It is their responsibility to make me feel better, not mine.*
- 7.“Shoulding” on yourself.** Using “should” for perfection, punishment or criticism, creating guilt and shame. *“I should have known better.” “I shouldn’t have to tell you how I feel.”*
- 8. Emotional Reasoning— Mistaking feelings for facts.** *“I feel it, therefore it must be true.” “If I feel stupid and boring, then I must be stupid and boring. If I feel guilty, I must be bad. If I feel stressed, I must be failing.”*
- 9. Change fallacy: attempting to change other people.** *“If I complain, nag, demand , pout ,remind, beg, help, love or wait enough..I can get other people change into who I want them to be.”*
- 10. Perfectionistic double standards.** Unrealistic standards for self., but not others. *“ Others are allowed to make mistakes, have flaws etc.. but I have to be perfect. I am not like other people. I must be perfect, no mistakes”.*
- 11. Mind reading or jumping to conclusions.** Without asking others, assuming what others think or feel. *“They think I am boring” “They won’t like me anymore if they know the truth..”*

Not sure if your thoughts are distorted? Ask yourself these questions:

1. What is actually true right now? (*Example: measurable or observable facts in current time*)
2. How would you view this situation if it were happening to your friend?
3. How would you advise someone else who was experiencing a situation such as this?
4. What is your intention, goal or desired outcome?
5. How could you cope and problem-solve to become a role model in this situation?

Question: *“I understand the concept of changing negative thoughts but it is not easy. I have been thinking these negative things my whole life. How do I change my thoughts now, after all these years?”*

Answer: Struggling with change is normal. It is easier to repeat familiar, negative thoughts and behaviors than it is to challenge or change them. But just because something is easy or familiar, does not make it right. Just because you have thought something your whole life does not mean it is right to believe it your whole life plus one more day. Reframing requires that you believe in the changes you are about to make. Change is successful when you believe it’s the right thing to do. This change must be aligned with your values.

Try this: Focus on the word in the box below. What’s wrong? What’s missing?

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If you answered, *“the word in the box is missing the letter e,”* you are correct. Now what if, in response to your correction, I say *“But that’s how I spell it! I have never added an e. It’s hard to start spelling it differently after all these years!”*

You might say, *“Well, I am sorry but the fact is that “before” really does end in “e.” Just because you have spelled it that way your whole life, does not change the fact that the correct spelling ends with an “e”.*

Reframing your thoughts is like editing. If your whole life you thought it was okay to tell yourself you are *“stupid, fat, ugly, lazy, or not good enough”*...that does not mean your thoughts were correct or healthy. Just because you *“always did it”* does not mean it is true or the right thing to do. Editing takes time. It is hard work. It is easier *not* to make corrections. Once you acknowledge that you need a correction, do you still feel comfortable repeating the error?

Before, when your thoughts were negative and pessimistic, you did not know better. The truth is, today you know better.

Today you understand that you have a right and a responsibility to edit or delete the negative thoughts and actions interfering with your goals, your dreams and your spirit. Your efforts to heal and grow will contribute to your status as a role model. It is never too late to become a positive role model. No matter what happened *before*, today you have a new opportunity...if you decide to take it. I am not asking you to live in denial about your past or about what you used to think, do or say. But I do invite you to consider,

“Positive Denial: I don’t deny what happened. I simply deny it’s power over me today.”

Marianne Williamson

Ready to change those negative thoughts by speaking to yourself as you would to a friend? Action speaks louder than words. Let’s practice your own self-talk ladder reframing by using the worksheet on the next page. This will seem awkward at first. That’s ok. Change takes time. Practice as often as you need to until the new thoughts become comfortable and familiar.