

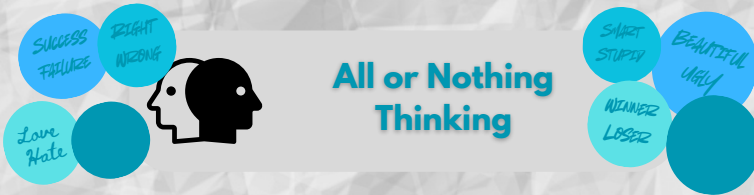


Cognitive Distortions



Your brain is a physical, biological organ in your body. We know through our experiences the brain can change or rewire. In fact, it does this your entire life! These experiences and our history form a bias. Some of these experiences can develop unhelpful and unwanted thoughts that impact our feelings and our behaviors! We call these thoughts: Cognitive Distortions.

Our mind's our the mental processes that are created by the brain. Below are some styles of Cognitive Distortions. These thought patterns are shortcuts our mind uses to try to keep us safe or answer some sort of problem based off of our experiences, emotions, what is happening and the limited data we may have. Most often, these distortions are trying to be helpful, but they can become distressing ways of thinking.



This type of thinking is also called Black and White thinking. Some people struggle with absolutes. Some examples are in the circles above. Here are some statements you may here someone with this thinking style say:

"You are either with me, or against me!"
"Either do it my way, or not at all!"
"If you're not first, you're last!"

People with this thinking style tend to think in absolutes and are very polarized. They struggle to see the world in shades of grey. This thinking style leads to:

- Inability to see either the good or bad in a person
- Negative self-talk
- Fear of trying new things and inflexibility

Without being able to see more than Black or White options, this thinker may struggle with acceptance, trying new ways of doing things and harshly judging themselves, others or situations.

BOOMER

X
Y
Z

Over Generalizing

IT'S NEVER
GOOD

SEEN ONE,
SEEN 'EM
ALL!

Overgeneralizing develops from one isolated incident and is perceived as a never-ending pattern of defeat. An individual who gets rejected once might use it to forecast an eternal future of rejections. This overgeneralization often leads to heightened feelings of despair. They may categorize people, places or events based off of minimal knowledge. This pattern of thinking is often used with: racism, sexism or agism. This thinking patterns operates by stereotyping.

We have understand that sometimes our mind can take shortcuts. It may try to fill in gaps from events based off of our past experiences and feelings about an event to form a conclusion of why something happened and why it made us feel this way. It's not 100% accurate! If you get bit by a dog, are all dogs dangerous? We need to understand how our experiences shape how we view the world!



Mental Filter/ Negative Lens

We see the world through various lenses which is based on our history, feelings, events, etc. Using a mental filter, this type of thinker doesn't see anything good. They notice all of their failures and don't see their success. Here's a test for you:

1+1=2
1+2=3
1+3=4
1+4=5
1+5=8
1+6=7
1+7=8
1+8=9
1+10=11

What did you notice? I know, 1+5 doesn't equal 8! A negative lens will focus on that and not see the 90% right on the test! This pattern focuses on the wrong and fails to see the successes!

Our brain can be rewired! A great way to change the negative lens is find 3 positives to every negative!



Disqualifying the Positives

Thinkers who disqualify positives have good things happen to them and then dismiss, discount or diminish achievements or events. These thinkers typically have low self-esteem or have a belief that they aren't good enough. This is much different than being humble! People who use this thinking pattern, often struggle to accept compliments for their accomplishments and may struggle with low self-esteem. Disqualifying thinkers may use statements like this:

"It was just my job."
"Anyone else would've done the same."
"It was luck."
"They're just saying that to be nice."
"I did this (good thing)....but"

As you read through some of these thinking styles, you will notice a pattern of negativity and skepticism. They can almost sound like an internal bully! As these thoughts are allowed to go unchecked, biases form and our brain connections get stronger and more powerful with these patterns.



Jumping to Conclusions

There's two types of Jumping to Conclusions:

Mind Reading

Mind readers "know" what other people are thinking. They are convinced that someone is thinking or going to respond a certain way. This type of thinking makes assumptions of others reactions. They may play out events or conversations in their heads and make a story of how the event will happen.

Fortune Telling

This type of thinker can predict the future! They see how something may play out based on their perspective, emotions and most of the predictions these thinking patterns produce are negative outcomes.



What If And Catastrophizing

Here are the “WHAT IF” thinkers! This pattern of thinking can be very creative in coming up with negative outcomes. This creativity can be so overwhelming that it brings change to a screeching halt!. This type of pattern comes up with all sorts of negative outcomes. If you think about it, your mind is trying to be analytical and brace you for any future problems. Unfortunately, we don't necessarily know what the future holds.

The other type of catastrophizing is going to the “worst case scenario.” This can be doomsday or apocalyptic thinking. Imagine if you thought the worst thing was going to happen with anything you did, how likely would you do it? This is a fear-based thinking pattern. The more, “what ifs” and “worst case scenarios” someone has, the more they anchor them down and cause fear of future change and leads to change paralysis.



Emotional Reasoning

Emotional thinkers “feel” their thoughts. They base reality off of their emotions even when the evidence doesn't match up. This pattern of thinking leads to people to base reality off of how they feel even though evidence doesn't support it. This type of thinking cause emotions to override logic.

When emotional reasoning drives someone's thought pattern, it can perpetuate negative emotions and their response to events. These emotions can increase one's negative beliefs about themselves, situations and lead to self defeat. Someone who is struggling with depression may feel hopeless or worthless which can be difficult to overcome when it begins to shape their reality.



Critical Words

Using critical words can lead to anger. We can apply words like “should” to ourselves we may feel like we have failed and frustration if you apply it to other people or situations. This type of thinking pattern develops a story of how things “should be” which is not aligned with reality.

Another critical word is “normal.” What do people mean when they say something like: “I just want to be normal.” They may compare themselves to others and feel less then. They may think they are the only one’s who experience something and this develops self-judgement.



Labeling

Our words impact the way we view ourselves, the world and how react. Choose your words wisely. When we label ourselves or others, this will impact how we treat ourselves and others. When a Labeler doesn’t win, they may say something like “I’m a loser” instead of developing a constructive statement like “The competition was challenging.” Labelers can be overly critical of themselves or other people. This can impact relationships and also negatively impact their self-esteem.



Personalizing

Blaming ourselves for something that wasn’t your fault is holding yourself accountable for something that wasn’t entirely your fault. For example, a child gets in trouble and a parent may personalize the action saying “I’m a bad father.” The person takes the blame of their child’s actions and gives no accountability for their child’s actions. This type of thinking pattern can impact constructive feedback and addressing the root problem.

Blaming others is another way to use personalizing thinking. This is the opposite of taking no accountability for your actions and blaming others for something that was your fault. An example is a team mate placing a loss on another player who took the buzzer beater and missed.



Cognitive Challenging



The way we begin any type of change is understanding what the problem is. Now that we have identified how we think, the first step is beginning to recognize when those thoughts occur. Remember, our thoughts aren't always accurate. We can challenge our thoughts. Below are a thought challenging question you can begin to ask yourself to start changing unhelpful and unwanted thoughts.

- Is this thought helpful to me?
- What is the evidence that supports this thought?
- What is the evidence that doesn't support this thought?
- What's the likelihood this would happen? (0-100%)
- What's the worst case and best case scenario?
- Is there anything I can do about this?
- If it did happen, how would I handle it in a constructive way?
- Is this thought a fact or an opinion?
- Am I confusing how my feelings for facts?
- Is this thought based on the way I feel or the facts?
- Am I falling for a thinking trap?
- What are 3 positives?
- Will this matter later? (in the day or 5 years from now)
- Does my future depend on this?
- Am I trying to interpret this situation without all the evidence?
- How can I look at this differently?
- What would I tell a friend?
- What can I learn from this situation?
- Am I overgeneralizing?
- Am I taking this personally?
- Am I looking at all the evidence or am I discounting some?
- Am I putting too much pressure on myself?
- Am I overlooking my own strengths?
- Have I handled similar situations like this before?
- Am I making this worse by exaggerating the situation?

These are just a few examples of questions you can ask yourself about how your thinking. Feel free to come up with your own thought challenging questions!