

Cognitive Distortions = Stinkin' Thinkin'

We all have different patterns of thinking that are unhelpful, particularly when they become patterns of negative thinking. Below is a list of such patterns, & some space for you to provide some examples...

1. All or nothing thinking - You see things in black & white categories. If your performance falls short of perfect, you see it as total failure. For example, if you made several errors in a piece of work, you may see yourself as totally incompetent.

2. Photocopying negatives - You pick out a single negative detail & dwell on it exclusively. For example, you focus on the difficulty you had doing one piece of work, when you do all your other work with ease.



3. Overgeneralisation - You see a single negative event as a part of a never ending pattern. Just because you had some problems with one piece of work, you think you won't be able to successfully do any of your work.



4. Looking at world through deep black glasses - You focus on what is wrong (your mistakes, your failures, your problems), blow it out of proportion & ignore or belittle anything that is right (your successes, good times & achievements). Note: looking through rose-coloured glasses can be misleading too. Aim to stop distorting the world in either direction.

5. Imagining the worst - a special case of exaggeration when you imagine the worst possible outcome for any event, usually so exaggerated that it is improbable, if not impossible.

6. Disqualifying the Positive - You reject positive experiences by insisting that they 'don't count' for some reason or another, such as saying that all the work you did correctly doesn't count because it was too simple. In this way, you maintain a negative belief that is contradicted by your everyday experience.

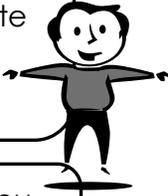


7. Labelling & Mislabelling - This is an extreme form of overgeneralisation where instead of describing your error, you attach a negative label to yourself ('I'm a loser'), or to someone else ('He's a rat bag').

8. Magnification (Catastrophising) - You exaggerate the importance of things (such as your goof-up or someone else's achievement), or you inappropriately shrink things until they appear tiny (your own desirable qualities or other people's imperfections).

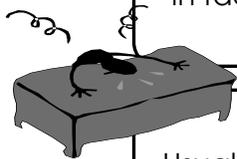
9. Emotional Reasoning - You assume your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are: 'I feel it, therefore it must be true'.

10. Jumping to conclusions - Mind reading - You conclude that someone is reacting negatively to you, & you don't bother to check this out, e.g. concluding that I think you are a fool because you made mistakes in your homework. **The fortune-teller error** - You anticipate that things will turn out badly, & you feel convincingly that your prediction is always an established fact, e.g. thinking 'this course won't help me'.



11. "Should" Statements - You try to motivate yourself with 'shoulds' & 'should nots' as if you had to be whipped & punished before you could be expected to do anything. For example: 'I should do my homework', which, in itself is useless & leads you to feel guilty when you don't.

12. Personalisation - You see yourself as the cause of some negative external even for which, in fact, you were not or could not be primarily responsible, such as yourself as the total cause of problems at work or in a relationship.



13. I can't stand it! - Thinking that you can't tolerate a situation when, in fact, you can. Usually, these thoughts produce so much anxiety that the person can't think of solutions to the problems they 'can't stand', e.g. 'I can't stand my wife's snoring!' or 'I can't tolerate my job!', when you have tolerated it for years.

14. I stink! - 'I am no good - I stink!' At best, these thoughts are gross overgeneralisations. They always end up making the person feel bad about him/herself. For example, 'Since I can't cook I can't do anything right' or simply, 'I'll probably never have very many friends'.



15. You stink! - These too, are over-generalisations. Usually a person is not totally wrong. But even if they are totally wrong, hating them won't make them change their ways. Nor is it a very pleasant emotion to feel in any case. For example: 'I hate my son because he never does what I tell him', or 'I hate my boss because he's not fair'.

16. Fallacy of Change - You assume that other people will change to suit you if you pressure them enough. The illusion is that your happiness depends on bringing about these changes, & this is closely linked to co-dependent behaviour.

17. Control Fallacies - You feel either that the events in your life are totally controlled by a force outside of your self or that you are responsible for everything.

18. Fallacy of Fairness - You judge people's actions by rules that you have concocted about what is & isn't fair. But, everyone has different ideas about fairness, so you're bound to end up feeling hurt, slighted or wrong.

19. Blaming - Thinking bad things that happen are someone's fault (your's/someone else's)

20. Poor Me - You think that you are the worst-off person in the world; 'nobody understands me' or 'nobody has experienced what I have had to experience'.

