

If the Thought is Bogus, You Need to Refocus!

Empowered Living

Edition 1: Volume 1

Cognitive Distortions

When Your Thoughts are Hurting You

Our emotional health depends on our ability to make good, reality-oriented judgments about what is going on in the world around us. Our moods and experiences are created by the thoughts we think, rather than the actual events around us. To think is to create, and our mood follows our dominant thoughts. Some of these thoughts we think are

distort our thoughts to some degree. Our interpretations of our world are not always based on reality, and colored by our cognitive distortions. To make matters worse, we are not even aware that we are thinking distortedly! That is because most of our thoughts are automatic and habitual. They come from our core developmental

“Do not anticipate trouble or worry about what may never happen. Keep in the sunlight.” ~Benjamin Franklin

distorted, or thinking errors. We assign meaning to events. Let's say you text a friend. Your friend doesn't respond. You might decide your friend is ignoring you and feel depressed. Later you find out your friend didn't have his/her phone and feel relieved. All of this happened in your thoughts. Most of us

history and our basic beliefs. It is important to examine our cognitive distortions, so we can increase our positive mood and decrease our negative moods. Take a look at the 10 cognitive distortions on the back page. See how many you recognize. Which do you do?

Cognitive Distortions: Make a plan.

How do you modify your cognitive distortions?

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Cognitive Distortions that Add to Anxiety, Depression and Anger

1. **All-or-nothing thinking:** You see things in black and white categories, with no middle ground.
2. **Overgeneralization:** You see a single negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat.
3. **Mental filter:** You pick out a single negative detail and focus on it exclusively.
4. **Disqualifying the positive:** You reject positive experiences by insisting they "don't count" for some reason.
5. **Jumping to conclusions:** You make a negative interpretation without actual evidence.
 - **Mind reading:** You conclude that someone is reacting negatively to you without checking it out.
 - **The Fortune Teller Error:** You anticipate that things will turn out badly and feel convinced that your prediction is an already-established fact. Also known as "Awfulizing."
6. **Magnification (catastrophizing) or minimization:** You exaggerate the importance of things or you inappropriately minimize things that are important.
7. **Emotional reasoning:** You believe that the way you feel reflects reality: "I feel it, therefore it must be true."
8. **Should statements:** You motivate yourself with shoulds and shouldn'ts, holding yourself and others to your stick rules "musts" and "oughts" are also offenders. Guilt or blame are the emotional consequences.
9. **Labeling and mislabeling:** This is an extreme form of overgeneralization. Instead of describing your error, you attach a negative label to yourself or another.
10. **Personalization:** Assuming responsibility for things that are outside your control.

Adapted From: Burns, David D., MD. 1989. The Feeling Good Handbook. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc.

This newsletter is intended to offer general information. Personal issues with a therapeutic content should be addressed with a professional clinician.

Plan and Practice

Instead of automatically reciting your cognitive distortions, start writing and evaluating them to recognize your thinking errors. Get out paper and pencil and do the following.

1. Make a list of your unwanted thoughts and evaluate them for Cognitive Distortions. These are the unwanted thoughts that distract you from your daily activities and make you worry more.
2. Rate your thoughts from the most stressful to the least stressful.
3. Look at the list of Cognitive Distortions and write down all the cognitive distortions that apply to each anxious thought. This will help you recognize the cognitive distortions.
4. Begin with your least stressful thought. Rewrite it so that there are no cognitive distortions in the statement.
5. You wouldn't choose to think distortedly. You are unaware that you are doing it. It is automatic. You need to train your brain to think deliberately. Tell yourself that "**If the thought is bogus, I will refocus.**" Then focus on, and recite your new thought.

Example

Worry Thought

"I will never get a good job."

Cognitive Distortions: Black and White Thinking, Jumping to Conclusions, "Awfulizing," Mental Filter, etc.

New Thought: "I will continue to apply for jobs and enhance my skills for as long as it takes until I get a good job."