

## Thought Distortions

Use the ideas below to challenge thoughts that are upsetting and determine whether the way you are thinking about something is really true or not.

- 1) **“Black and white” thinking:** You see things only as one way or another, nothing in between. If your performance falls short of perfect, you see yourself as a total failure. If your partner does something that irritates you, she “always” does it.
- 2) **Overgeneralization:** You draw a conclusion from a single event or piece of evidence. One setback in reaching your goal is seen as a never-ending pattern of failure.
- 3) **Mental Filter:** You pick out a single negative detail and dwell on it exclusively so that your vision of all reality becomes darkened. You lose sight of all the positives.
- 4) **Disqualifying the Positive:** You reject positive experiences by insisting they “don’t count.” As a result you maintain a negative belief that is contradicted by your everyday experiences.
- 5) **Jumping to Conclusions:** You make a negative interpretation and conclusion even though you have no clear evidence your conclusion is accurate. You may decide that a person is angry with you because of a look or tone of voice (You don’t know unless you ask! You might have interpreted that look or tone incorrectly). You might also decide that an event will turn out badly and act as if your prediction has already happened.
- 6) **Personalization:** You see yourself as the cause of negative events that you have no control over, and apply this faulty logic in a way that assumes you should have known better and acted differently so you could prevent a bad thing from happening.
- 7) **Blaming:** You hold anyone else responsible for your pain or negative experiences, or go the opposite way and blame yourself for every problem. For instance, no one can make another person feel or act a certain way – we each own our emotions and behaviors.
- 8) **Unhealthy Comparisons:** You compare yourself to others – attempting to determine who is better, smarter, more attractive, etc.
- 9) **Magnification or Minimization:** This may also be referred to as catastrophizing. You may exaggerate the importance of events or facts, or you minimize them until they are insignificant. You may feel bad about yourself because you tend to minimize your own good qualities, while you also magnify negative qualities you do not like in yourself.
- 10) **Emotional Reasoning:** You assume that your negative emotions reflect the way things really are as if since you feel it, it must be true. If you feel like an idiot, that means you are an idiot.
- 11) **Should Statements:** You try to motivate yourself with “should,” “shouldn’t,” “must,” or “ought.” The emotional consequence is guilt. When you direct should statements toward others, you feel anger, frustration, and resentment.
- 12) **Labeling and Mislabeling:** This is an extreme form of overgeneralization. Instead of describing your error, you attach a negative label to yourself: “I’m a loser.” When you don’t agree with someone else’s behavior, you attach a negative label to him: “He’s lazy.” Mislabeling involves describing an event with language that is highly colored and emotional loaded.
- 13) **Looking for Fairness:** All our lives we have heard that “life isn’t fair” and yet you still tend to judge situations based on whether you believe they are fair or not. This leads to resentment and negative emotions, especially if other people don’t agree with what you think is/is not fair.
- 14) **Fallacy of Change:** You expect others to change in the way you want, and this will happen if you pressure them or convince them. You may believe your happiness depends on this change.
- 15) **Expecting Payoff or Reward:** You expect to be rewarded for all your sacrifices and self-denial, as if someone is keeping score.
- 16) **Need to be Right:** Being right is more important than others around you, even people you care deeply for. You feel the need to prove your opinion, belief, or action is right. You may also need others to agree with you, if they don’t, it is as if this means there is something wrong.