

Cognitive Distortions

This is a list of common thinking patterns or “self-talk” that contributes to increased anxiety or other distress. Identifying your patterns and labeling them as unhelpful is often an important step to overcoming anxiety or stepping outside of the negative self-talk that feeds depression and self-doubt.

- 1. ALL-OR-NOTHING THINKING:** Seeing things in black and white categories. If you experience a minor setback, you start to thinking of yourself as a total failure.
- 2. OVERGENERALIZATION:** Seeing one single negative event as the whole picture. One negative thought or misstep colors your view of your life or your abilities.
- 3. MENTAL FILTER:** Picking out a single negative detail and dwell on it exclusively or getting stuck on one negative perspective and blocking in room for alternatives.
- 4. DISQUALIFYING THE POSITIVE:** Rejecting positive experiences by insisting they "don't count" for some reason or another. “Yes, but...”
- 5. JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS:** Making a negative interpretation even though there are no actual facts to support your conclusion. Viewing a negative outcome as inevitable.

Mind Reading: Concluding that someone is reacting negatively to you without knowing this for certain.

The Fortune Teller Error: Anticipating that things will turn out badly and feeling convinced that your prediction of a negative outcome is absolutely true.

- 6. MAGNIFICATION (CATASTROPHIZING) OR MINIMIZATION:** Exaggerating the importance or potential impact of one event (one minor negative misstep spiraling into a complete failure of life) or experience or inappropriately dismissing things as not being significant or impactful.
- 7. EMOTIONAL REASONING:** Assuming that your negative emotions reflect reality: "I feel it, therefore it must be true." Confusing a feeling for a fact.
- 8. SHOULD STATEMENTS:** Trying to motivate yourself with should's and shouldn't's. This typically leads to unnecessary feelings of guilt.
- 9. LABELING AND MISLABELING:** Extreme overgeneralization. Instead of describing your error, you attach a negative label to yourself. "I'm a total loser."
- 10. PERSONALIZATION:** Seeing yourself as the cause of some negative external event or situation. A friend doesn't say hello or acts abruptly toward you and you assume it is because of something you did.