

The Most Common Cognitive Distortions

In 1976, psychologist Aaron Beck first proposed the theory behind cognitive distortions and in the 1980s, David Burns was responsible for popularising it with common names and examples for the distortions.

With practice, each of these distortions can be challenged. This will form a large part of your work to overcome negative thought patterns and improve your confidence.

This is a key starting point to overcoming issues such as anxiety, low self esteem and lack of confidence so take a look through the following examples and consider if they sound like something you do.

<p>1. Filtering. We take the negative details and magnify them while filtering out all positive aspects of a situation. For instance, a person may pick out a single, unpleasant detail and dwell on it exclusively so that their vision of reality becomes darkened or distorted.</p>	<p>2. Polarised Thinking In polarised thinking, things are either “black-or-white.” We must be perfect or we’re a failure — there is no middle ground. You place people or situations in “either/or” categories, with no shades of grey or allowing for the complexity of most people and situations. If your performance falls short of perfect, you see yourself as a total failure.</p>
<p>3. Overgeneralisation. In this cognitive distortion, we come to a general conclusion based on a single incident or a single piece of evidence. If something bad happens only once, we expect it to happen repeatedly. A person may see a single, unpleasant event as part of a never-ending pattern of defeat.</p>	<p>4. Jumping to Conclusions. Without individuals saying so, we know what they are feeling and why they act the way they do. In particular, we are able to determine how people are feeling toward us. For example, a person may conclude that someone is reacting negatively toward them but doesn’t bother to find out if they are correct. Another example is a person may anticipate that things will turn out badly and will feel convinced that their prediction is already an established fact.</p>
<p>5. Catastrophising. We expect disaster to strike, no matter what. This is also referred to as “magnifying or minimising.” We hear about a problem and use what if questions (e.g., “What if tragedy strikes?” “What if it happens to me?”). For example, a person might exaggerate the importance of insignificant events (such as their mistake, or someone else’s achievement). Or they may inappropriately shrink the magnitude of significant events until they appear tiny (for example, a person’s own desirable qualities or someone else’s imperfections).</p>	<p>6. Personalisation. Personalisation is a distortion where a person believes that everything others do or say is some kind of direct, personal reaction to the person. We also compare ourselves to others trying to determine who is smarter, better looking, etc. A person engaging in personalisation may also see themselves as the cause of some unhealthy external event that they were not responsible for. For example, “We were late to the dinner party and caused the hostess to overcook the meal. If I had only pushed my husband to leave on time, this wouldn’t have happened.”</p>
<p>7. Control Fallacies. If we feel externally controlled, we see ourselves as helpless a victim of fate. For example, “I can’t help it if the quality of the work is poor, my boss demanded I</p>	<p>8. Fallacy of Fairness. We feel resentful because we think we know what is fair, but other people won’t agree with us. As our parents tell us when we’re growing up and something</p>

<p>work overtime on it.” The fallacy of internal control has us assuming responsibility for the pain and happiness of everyone around us. For example, “Why aren’t you happy? Is it because of something I did?”</p>	<p>doesn’t go our way, “Life isn’t always fair.” People who go through life applying a measuring ruler against every situation judging its “fairness” will often feel badly and negative because of it. Because life isn’t “fair” — things will not always work out in your favour, even when you think they should.</p>
<p>9. Blaming. We hold other people responsible for our pain or take the other track and blame ourselves for every problem. For example, “Stop making me feel bad about myself!” Nobody can “make” us feel any particular way — only we have control over our own emotions and emotional reactions.</p>	<p>10. Should. We have a list of ironclad rules about how others and we should behave. People who break the rules make us angry, and we feel guilty when we violate these rules. A person may often believe they are trying to motivate themselves with should and shouldn’t, as if they must be punished before they can do anything. For example, “I really should exercise. I shouldn’t be so lazy.” Musts and ought are also offenders. The emotional consequence is guilt. When a person directs should statements toward others, they often feel anger, frustration and resentment.</p>
<p>11. Emotional Reasoning. We believe that what we feel must be true automatically. If we feel stupid and boring, then we must be stupid and boring. You assume that your unhealthy emotions reflect the way things really are — “I feel it, therefore it must be true.”</p>	<p>12. Fallacy of Change. We expect that other people will change to suit us if we just pressure or cajole them enough. We need to change people because our hopes for happiness seem to depend entirely on them.</p>
<p>13. Global Labelling. We generalize one or two qualities into a negative global judgment. These are extreme forms of generalising and are also referred to as “labelling” and “mislabelling.” Instead of describing an error in context of a specific situation, a person will attach an unhealthy label to themselves. For example, they may say, “I’m a loser” in a situation where they failed at a specific task. When someone else’s behaviour rubs a person the wrong way, they may attach an unhealthy label to him, such as “He’s a real jerk.” Mislabelling involves describing an event with language that is highly coloured and emotionally loaded. For example, instead of saying someone drops her children off at day-care every day, a person who is mislabelling might say that “she abandons her children to strangers.”</p>	<p>14. Always Being Right. We are continually on trial to prove that our opinions and actions are correct. Being wrong is unthinkable and we will go to any length to demonstrate our rightness. For example, “I don’t care how badly arguing with me makes you feel, I’m going to win this argument no matter what because I’m right.” Being right often is more important than the feelings of others around a person who engages in this cognitive distortion, even loved ones.</p>

Some people find that they do a number of these examples, some find that they do one all the time. We are all unique in the way that we think.

Now that you have identified what thought patterns are making things worse, get in touch so that we can start working on how to change them!!