

## 15 Cognitive Distortions

Cognitive distortions are patterns of thinking that can lead to negative emotions and behaviors.

**1. All-or-nothing thinking:** Seeing things in black-and-white terms without considering the middle ground.

*Example: Believing that receiving a B on a test makes you a complete failure.*

**2. Overgeneralization:** Making broad, sweeping conclusions based on one piece of evidence.

*Example: Believing that because one person didn't like your presentation, everyone must think it was terrible.*

**3. Catastrophizing:** Assuming the worst possible outcome will occur.

*Example: Believing that if you make a mistake at work, you'll immediately get fired.*

**4. Discounting the positive:** Dismissing or downplaying positive experiences or qualities.

*Example: Rejecting compliments by saying they don't count or aren't true.*

**5. Mind reading:** Assuming you know what others are thinking, usually in a negative light.

*Example: Believing that someone is angry with you without any evidence to support this assumption.*

**6. Fortune telling:** Predicting the future, usually with a negative outcome.

*Example: Thinking that you'll never find a romantic partner, so there's no point in trying to date.*

**7. Emotional reasoning:** Believing that because you feel a certain way, it must be true.

*Example: Feeling unattractive and concluding that nobody could possibly find you attractive.*

**8. Should statements:** Using "should," "ought to," or "must" statements that create unrealistic expectations.

*Example: Believing that you should always be able to handle everything on your own, without ever asking for help.*

**9. Labeling:** Applying harsh labels to yourself or others based on behavior.

*Example: Calling yourself a "loser" for making a mistake.*

**10. Personalization:** Taking responsibility for events that are out of your control.

*Example: Believing that a friend's bad mood must be due to something you did or said.*

**11. Blaming:** Holding others responsible for your negative emotions or experiences.

*Example: Blaming a coworker for your own lack of productivity.*

**12. Mental Filter:** Dwelling on a single negative detail and allowing it to taint your entire perception.

*Example: Focusing only on the one critical comment in a sea of positive feedback.*

**13. Jumping to Conclusions:** Making negative interpretations without supporting evidence. This can manifest as either mind reading or fortune telling.

*Example: Assuming a friend is mad at you without any indication or predicting that an upcoming social event will be a disaster without any evidence to support this belief.*

**14. Control fallacies:** Feeling helpless as if you have no control or excessive responsibility for outcomes.

*Example: Feeling like a victim of circumstance and believing that nothing you do will make a difference.*

**15. Comparisons:** Measuring your worth based on how you stack up against others.

*Example: Feeling inadequate because a friend seems to be more successful in their career.*

### **Questions to Challenge Cognitive Distortions**

1. What evidence supports this thought or belief?
2. What evidence contradicts this thought or belief?
3. Am I focusing only on the negative aspects of this situation?

4. What other perspectives or interpretations are possible here?
5. Am I jumping to conclusions without enough evidence?
6. Would I say the same thing to a friend in a similar situation?
7. Am I assuming I know what others are thinking without direct evidence?
8. Is this thought based on facts, or is it influenced by my emotions?
9. Am I overgeneralizing based on a single event or experience?
10. What would happen if I considered a less negative interpretation of this situation?
11. Am I discounting or minimizing the positive aspects of this situation?
12. How likely is the worst-case scenario that I am imagining?
13. Are there any alternative explanations for this situation?
14. Am I using all-or-nothing thinking, seeing things as black or white with no middle ground?
15. What are the potential consequences of continuing to believe this thought or belief?
16. Is this belief based on my own unreasonably high or rigid standards?
17. Have I interpreted this situation as catastrophic when it is just a minor inconvenience?
18. Am I ignoring important information that doesn't fit with my current belief?

19. Am I personalizing this situation, taking responsibility for things beyond my control?

20. What would a more objective, balanced perspective on this situation look like?