

## NEGATIVE THINKING AND NEGATIVE EMOTIONS COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

Cognitive distortions are those thoughts and ideas that maintain negative thinking and negative emotions. Dr. David Burns researched the most common cognitive distortions and found that eliminating these distortions of reality and reducing the resulting negative thinking and negative emotions improved mood and discouraged maladies such as depression and anxiety disorder.

Everyone has negative thinking and negative emotions some of the time: this is healthy. It is only unhealthy when one begins repeating a pattern of cognitive distortions that result in excessive or prolonged negative feelings and negative emotions.

Many of the cognitive distortions are similar to each other. Try to identify the cognitive distortions in your thinking; do not worry about distinguishing them from one another.

1. **All-Or-Nothing Thinking** - Thinking of things in absolute terms, like "always", "every" or "never". This is also called "black-or-white thinking". Few aspects of human behavior are so absolute as there are almost always more than two alternatives.
2. **Overgeneralization** - Taking isolated cases and using them to make wide generalizations, such as viewing an event as a never-ending pattern of defeat when there is no supporting evidence.
3. **Mental Filter** - Focusing exclusively on certain, usually negative or upsetting, aspects of something while ignoring the rest, like a tiny imperfection in a piece of clothing. Dwelling on the negative and ignoring the positive.
4. **Disqualifying the Positive** - Continually "shooting down" positive experiences for arbitrary reasons and/or double-standard reasons. Insisting your positive qualities and efforts do not count.
5. **Jumping to Conclusions** - Assuming something negative where there is no evidence to support it:
  - a. *Mind Reading* - Assuming the intentions of others, that they are reacting negatively to you.
  - b. *Fortune telling* - Predicting how things will turn before they happen, predicting things will turn out badly.

6. **Magnification and Minimization** - Inappropriately understating or exaggerating the way people or situations truly are. Blowing things way out of proportion or minimizing them. Often the positive characteristics of *other people* are exaggerated and negative characteristics are understated:
  - a. *Catastrophizing* - Focusing on the worst possible outcome, however unlikely, or thinking that a situation is unbearable or impossible when it is really just uncomfortable.
7. **Emotional Reasoning** - Making decisions and arguments based on how you *feel* rather than objective reality. "I feel like a failure, therefore I must be a failure."
8. **Should Statements** - Concentrating on what you think "should" or "must" or "have to" or "ought" to be rather than the actual situation you are faced with, or having **rigid rules** which you think should always apply no matter what the circumstances are.
9. **Labeling** - Rather than describing a specific behavior or event, you assign a label to someone or yourself that puts them in absolute and unalterable terms. Instead of saying "I made a mistake," you tell yourself "I am stupid, a loser, or a jerk."
10. **Personalization or Self-Blame** - Assuming you or others directly caused things when that may not have been the case. You blame yourself for something you were not entirely responsible for.