

COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

How to recognize and reframe thinking errors



POLARIZED THINKING

An "all-or nothing" or "either/or" perspective yielding unrealistic expectations and cannot account for the complexity of most situations

- **If I don't achieve this goal, I am a failure.**
 - If I don't achieve this goal, it's an opportunity for growth and learning rather than a reflection of my overall worth.
- **If I'm not always productive, I'm being lazy.**
 - It's okay to take breaks, rest and relaxation are essential for well-being.
- **Either I do everything perfectly or I shouldn't even try.**
 - Every effort counts, and progress is made by learning from both successes and setbacks.



MENTAL FILTERING

A focus on certain aspects of a situation while discounting others

Negative Mental Filtering

- **Because I made a mistake, the whole thing was a failure.**
 - Overall, it went well and I can learn from that one area for improvement.

Disqualifying the Positive

- **I got a good grade, but it was just luck because my professor is an easy grader.**
 - I am proud of the hard work I put into this assignment to do well on it.
- **It's not that big of an accomplishment; anyone could have done it.**
 - I have put a lot of effort into honing my skills and it is paying off. I am grateful for the recognition of my hard work.



JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS

Assuming what other people are thinking or making predictions about future outcomes

- **I didn't get the grade that I wanted; I'm never going to succeed in this field.**
 - This is an opportunity for me to analyze my study approach and seek help to improve my performance in the future.
- **They haven't replied to my message, they must be mad at me.**
 - There could be various reasons for the delay. I'll reach out and check in on them later.
- **I made a mistake at work; my boss is going to fire me.**
 - This is an opportunity for me to learn from my mistake, take responsibility, and discuss it with my boss to find a solution.



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CATASTROPHIZING

Blowing things out of proportion or underplaying the importance of something

Minimization

- **They seem to know more than me, I won't even bother trying to contribute.**
 - I can appreciate their expertise while also contributing my own unique view.
- **I made some progress, but it's insignificant compared to where I want to be.**
 - I can celebrate every step forward and use it as motivation for further growth.

Magnification

- **I'm feeling anxious about this situation. I know I'll completely freeze, embarrass myself, and ruin everything.**
 - Feeling nervous is normal. I can prepare the best I can and remember that this one situation does not determine my value as a person or my future.



SHOULD STATEMENTS

Setting high expectations for self and others with words like "must", "have to", or "should"

- **I should not be feeling this way.**
 - It's okay to feel the way I do. Instead of judging or suppressing my feelings, I can acknowledge and respond to them with self-compassion and curiosity.
- **I should have achieved more by now, I'm so far behind.**
 - Everyone's journey is unique, and there's no set timeline for success.
- **I should be able to be in control. Uncertainty is unbearable.**
 - I can focus on what I can control and let go of what is beyond my influence.



PERSONALIZATION & BLAMING

Unfairly concluding that total responsibility belongs to yourself or to others

Personalization

- **I feel responsible for their happiness. If they're unhappy, it's because I failed them.**
 - While I care about this person's well-being, their happiness is not solely my responsibility. While they have their agency, I can offer support and love.
- **It's all my fault that my partner left me, I must have said or done something wrong.**
 - Relationships involve two individuals; I can reflect on what I learned and work towards healthier connections in the future.

Blaming

- **It's the professor's fault that I am not doing well in their class.**
 - While the teaching style of the professor presents challenges, I can take responsibility for my own learning by seeking additional resources.

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