

COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

Number 1

ALL OR NOTHING THINKING
SOMETIMES CALLED POLARIZED THINKING

In this mindset everything is all or nothing.

We must be perfect, or we are an abject failure.

Everything is seen in extremes.

Number 2

NEGATIVITY ERROR OR OVERGENERALIZATION

One dwells on a single negative event and perceives it to be a never-ending pattern.

For example, one bad grade in college is a sign that the student who receives it is a failure and should quit school.

Number 3

REJECTING THE POSITIVE OR FILTERING

In this scenario the person magnifies negative details while filtering out any positive ones.

In this way of thinking life begins to look very dark and depressing indeed.

Number 4

NEGATIVE PROGNOSTICATION

Now this is one of my favorites.

This kind of thinking makes it impossible to have any fun at all.

Here you simply predict that all upcoming events are either going to be unpleasant, uninteresting or not worth your time.

Number 5

MIND READING OR JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS

This is a fun one.

This one really wreaks havoc in romantic relationships.

But due to its versatility it can destroy all kinds of other relationships as well.

Friendships, collegial connections

Family ties, neighbors can all be damaged.

This way of thinking can literally wreck any connection you put in its way.

It can even cause people to misinterpret the behavior of animals as well.

With this one you are sure you know what others are thinking and feeling and just to make it more interesting you further assume you know why they act the way they do.

And you need not be burdened with any pesky truth or fact finding.

You might for example decide that someone has a grudge against you and not bother with any sort of fact finding or verification.

Or you might use this type of thinking you might for example anticipate that things will turn out badly in your next relationship so why bother dating.

Number 6

BINOCULAR THINKING

Using this type of reasoning you exaggerate or minimize the importance of something until it is either huge or minuscule.

All life events become the worst thing ever or of no importance.

Number 7 EMOTIONAL LOGIC OR REASONING

This one is a classic.

It goes like this.
“If I feel it it must be true”.

Whatever you are feeling at any given time about whatever or whomever must be true.

Enough said.

Number 8 SHOULD

Should, must, ought, and supposed to.

These are some of the most deadly words in any language.

First of all, shoulds don't work as motivators, in fact quite the opposite, they just make you feel “shouldy”.

The premise here is that there exist some set of secret, iron clad rules that SHOULD govern everyone's behavior.

Shoulds are shame words that only serve to hurt and when directed toward others they generate feelings of anger, frustration and resentment.

Number 9 PEJORATIVE JUDGEMENT OR GLOBAL LABELING

This is an extreme version of overgeneralization.

Using this type of thinking you generalize one or two qualities into a negative, global judgement about themselves or others.

For example, instead of saying that “someone drops their dog off at the daycare center” -

Using this type of thinking dropping the dog off in that way would be expressed as “they abandon their dog and leave it with strangers”.

Number 10 PERSONALIZATION

The assumption that everything is about you.

In this kind of thinking causes a person constantly compares themselves to others, attempting to determine who is smarter, prettier and so forth.

Number 11 HEAVEN'S REWARD FALLACY

This is the entirely false belief that one's sacrifice and self-denial will be rewarded, as if some unseen, global force is keeping score.

This kind of thinking inevitably leads to a great deal of bitterness when the much-anticipated reward doesn't materialize.

Number 12 ALWAYS BEING RIGHT

Being wrong is unacceptable with this type of thinking.

The person who thinks in this way will go to any lengths to demonstrate their rightness.

Being right is much more important than the feelings of others no matter who they are.

Number 12 FALLACY OF CHANGE

The belief here is that a person expects that others will change to suit them if they just cajole, pressure, or demand it of them.

A person must have the people in their life change because they believe that their hopes and for happiness and success lay in the hands of others.

Number 13 BLAMING

In this mindset people other than themselves are held responsible for any emotional disappointment or pain.

Number 14

THE FALLACY OF FAIRNESS

In this thought process the person using it believes that they know what is fair.

As life doesn't always measure up to their rules, they often feel resentful, angry, and hopeless.

Number 15

CONTROL FALLACY

This thinking is on a continuum.

On one end the person feels externally controlled and feels like a helpless victim of fate.

On the other end of the continuum is the notion of internal control, that has the person thinking that they are responsible for the pain and happiness of everyone around you.

NUMBER 16

AWFULIZING AND CATASTROPHIZING

Predicting terrible outcomes and expecting disaster to strike at all times.

This style of thinking is punctuated by lots of negative magnification and "what if this or that terrible thing happens to me?" questions.

SO HOW DO YOU CHANGE COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS?

Although it may seem daunting at first glance, it can be done.
I promise.

As the saying goes, the journey of a thousand miles is begun with the first step.

So we shall begin with:

Step 1

IDENTIFY THE COGNITIVE DISTORTION

First begin by determining the cognitive distortions that you use in your daily life.

Write them down.

Focus on them and work on identifying them as you think them.

You can actually make it fun to catch yourself.

COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

STEP 2

EXAMINE THE EVIDENCE

At this point in the process you need to step back and work at removing emotionality from the equation.

Look at the thoughts connected to any given event and decide if those statements reflect an opinion or a fact.

For example, "I'm a horrible person or, there is something wrong with me", are opinions.

"I didn't get to work on time, or "I forgot to pay the electric bill", are facts.

Separating fact from fiction allows you to determine which part of your thinking you need to change.

STEP 3

THE DOUBLE STANDARD

We frequently give poorer advice and speak less well to ourselves, than we do to others.

It is important that you talk to yourself and give yourself the same thoughtful and supportive advice that you would give anyone else.

You would probably not tell someone else just they are a loser because their report was late.

You would probably commiserate with them and ask what circumstances led up to the incident.

Then you might explore with them what could be done to reduce the possibility of it happening again.

STEP 4

THINKING IN SHADES OF GREY OR EVEN PASTELS

Instead of thinking in terms of black and white, consider things on a continuum.

For example, evaluate how things are going on a success scale of 1-10.

One is a distinct lack of success and ten is the best result imaginable.

Look at where your efforts really lie on the scale rather than thinking of them as perfect or an abject failure.

Treat yourself in some way.

COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

STEP 5

THE EXPERIMENTAL METHOD

Don't consider your assumptions to be facts.

For example, if you've been avoiding a task because you think it's too hard.

On a scale of 1-10 (one being highly undesirable and 10 being highly desirable) rate how undesirable Or desirable the task or event you are facing might.

If it's a job to be done, break it down into smaller parts and do them in short spurts of effort, say 20-45 minutes or so, rather than all at once.

Or go to the event with a time limit of one hour in mind and only stay longer if you find that you are enjoying yourself.

Following either of the above, rerate the task event on your 1-10 scale after the fact and see what the rating really is.

Or if you've decided that your friends are all mad at you.

Rather than avoiding them based on an assumption, why not test this hypothesis by inviting one or some of them to join you in a social activity?

This will provide you with an opportunity to talk with your friends and give you a more realistic picture of the state your relationships.

STEP 6

THE SURVEY METHOD

Check the rationality of your thoughts with other people.

For example, if you assume that happy couples never fight, ask some of your friends if this is true in their relationships.

This method is another way to gain perspective on your thought process and judgement.

STEP 7

CHANGE YOUR SEMANTICS

Instead of using should, must, ought and supposed to, use want, need and demand instead.

Watch how much you your life will change when you become self-determined and responsible only unto yourself.

STEP 8

DEFINITIONS

You know the old phrase about questioning authority?
Well, it's time to question the authority of your assumptions.

For example, if you think of yourself as "undesirable", ask yourself undesirable to whom and compared to whom?

Undesirable to everyone or only people taller than yourself?

Are you the only one in the world that is "undesirable"?
Aren't other people "undesirable" too?

The more questions you ask about the usefulness or lack of usefulness of a label, the more you may come to realize that labels not only don't tell the truth they do not serve you or in a constructive manner.

STEP 8

RE- ATTRIBUTION

It is here that you look for external factors or other persons who may have contributed to an outcome, rather than taking responsibility for everything that happens.

It's not about deflecting blame it's about coming to understand what role you really did or did not play in life events.

STEP 10

COST BENEFIT ANALYSIS

List the advantages and disadvantages of distorted thoughts, feelings and behaviors.

Asking yourself, "How will it help me or hurt me to believe this negative, irrational belief"?

AND

"Are the thoughts and feelings I am assigning to life events helping me move forward toward the achievement of my goals or keeping me from them"?