



# Cognitive Distortions



Mistakes in Thinking

# Cognitive Distortions

- All-or-Nothing Thinking
- Overgeneralization
- Mental Filter
- Disqualifying the Positive
- Jumping to Conclusions
  - Mind reading
  - The Fortune Teller
- Magnification or Minimization
- Emotional Reasoning
- Should Statements
- Labelling and mislabelling
- Personalization

# All-or-Nothing Thinking

- You see things in black and white categories. If your performance falls short of perfect, you see yourself as a total failure
- Example: A straight-A student who gets a B on an exam concludes, “Now I am a total failure.”

# Overgeneralization

- You see a single negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat.
- Example: A shy young man asks a girl for a date. When she politely declined because of previous engagement, he said to himself, “I’m never going to get a date. No girl would ever want to date me. I’ll be lonely and miserable all my life.”

# Mental Filter

- You pick out a single negative detail and dwell on it exclusively so that your vision of all reality becomes darkened, like a drop of ink that discolours the entire beaker of water.
- Example: You overhear someone making fun of your best friend. You become furious, thinking, “That’s what the human race is like – cruel and insensitive!”

# Disqualifying the positive

- You reject positive experiences by insisting they “don’t count” for some reason or other. In this way you can maintain a negative belief that is contradicted by your everyday experiences.
- Example: If someone praises you or your work, you say to yourself, “They are just being nice.”

# Jumping to Conclusions

- You make a negative interpretation even though there are no definite facts that support your conclusion.
- *a. Mind reading.* You arbitrarily conclude that someone is reacting negatively to you, and you don't bother to check this out.
- Example: A friend passes you on the street and fails to say hello. You respond by thinking that they ignored you and must not like you any more

# Jumping to Conclusions

- b. *Fortune Teller*. You anticipate that things will turn out badly, and you feel convinced that your prediction is an already established fact.
- Example: During an anxiety attack, you tell yourself, “I’m going to pass out or go crazy.” Neither of these things has ever happened before, but you are convinced that this will be the outcome.



# Magnification or Minimization

- You exaggerate the importance of things (such as your goof-up or someone else's achievement) or you inappropriately shrink things until they appear tiny (your own desirable qualities or the other person's imperfections). This is also called the “binocular trick.”
- Example: When you make a mistake, it is the end of the world, but when you do something well, it is insignificant.

# Emotional Reasoning

- You assume that your negative (or positive) emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are: “I feel it, therefore it must be true.”
- Example: “I feel inadequate, therefore I must be worthless” *or*
- “I feel so in love, this *must* the right person” *or*
- “I no longer feel in love, so this person is not right for me any longer.”

# “Should” statements

- You try to motivate yourself with “shoulds” and “shouldn’ts” as if you had to be whipped and punished before you could be expected to do anything. “Musts” and “oughts” are also offenders. The emotional consequence is guilt. When you direct “should” statements towards others you feel anger, frustration, and resentment.

# Should statements

- Example: “I *should* be more involved and take on a more active role” leads to feeling more pressured and resentful. Directed towards others, these statements lead to frustration: “He shouldn’t be so self-centred and thoughtless” and thus to feelings of resentment as well as feelings of self-righteousness!

# Labelling and Mislabelling

- This is an extreme form of overgeneralization. Instead of describing your error, you attach a negative label to yourself: “I’m such a *loser*.” When someone else’s behaviour rubs you the wrong way, you attach a negative label to them. Mislabelling involves describing an event with language that is highly coloured and emotionally loaded. Both forms generate hostility to self and others.

# Personalization

- You see yourself as the cause of some negative external event which in fact you were not primarily responsible for.
- Example: A mother sees her child's report card with a note from the teacher indicating that the child was not working well. She immediately decides, "I must be a bad mother. This shows how I have failed!"