

Cognitive Distortions

Identifying Thinking Patterns

Thoughts are not facts. But some of them are so automatic, we forget to question them. Once we recognize the pattern, it becomes easier not to get swept up in it.

1

Black-and-White Thinking: Seeing things only in extremes, with no middle ground.

"If I didn't do it perfectly, then I'm a failure."

Ask yourself: Is there room in the middle? What's between zero and a hundred?

2

Overgeneralization: Taking a single event and applying it to everything.

"It's always like this. I never succeed."

Ask yourself: Really always? Isn't there even one exception?

3

Mental Filter: Focusing only on the negative and ignoring the rest.

"I got 9 compliments and one criticism. I can only think about the criticism."

Try asking: What else happened? What are we not noticing?

4

Mind Reading: Assuming we know what others are thinking.

"She probably thinks I'm weird."

Ask yourself: Do we have evidence? Or is this the story our mind is telling us?

5

Fortune Telling: A tendency to be convinced we know the future, and it always looks bad.

"It won't work. I'll fail."

Check: Can we really know what will happen? How often has that prediction actually come true?

6

Minimizing and Magnifying: A tendency to shrink successes and blow up failures.

"Success? That was luck. I made a mistake? Catastrophe."

Ask yourself: If a good friend described themselves this way, what would we say to them?

7

Emotional Reasoning: When a feeling becomes evidence.

"I feel worthless, so I probably am worthless."

Ask yourself: What are the actual facts here, separate from the feeling?

8

Should Statements: Living by a list of "must," "should," and "have to."

"I must be perfect. I'm not allowed to make mistakes."

A question to pause on: Who made that rule? What would happen if we let it go?

9

Labeling: Sticking a label on ourselves instead of seeing it as a behavior.

"I'm lazy. I'm a failure. I'm not normal."

Ask yourself: Are we really like that, or did we simply do something that felt that way this time?

10

Personalization: A tendency to take responsibility for things outside our control.

"My child failed the test. I'm a bad mother."

Ask yourself: How much of this really depends on us? What falls outside our control?

11

Comparing to Others: Measuring ourselves against others, and always losing.

"Everyone else has it figured out, except me."

Check: Are we really seeing the full picture of their lives?

12

Blaming: A tendency to place responsibility on others instead of looking at what's in our hands.

"It's because he doesn't support me."

Ask yourself: What part of this is still in our hands?

My distortion: _____

The feeling is real. The thought that caused it may not be.

Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space lies our choice.

Attributed to Viktor Frankl

Based on the work of Aaron Beck and David Burns