

Challenging Cognitive Distortions

Situation or Event	Negative Thoughts	Cognitive Distortions											Adaptive Response
		1. All or Nothing Thinking	2. Overgeneralization	3. Mental Filter	4. Disqualifying the Positive	5. Jumping to Conclusions	6. Magnification / Minimization	7. Emotional Reasoning	8. Should Statements	9. Labeling / Mislabeled	10. Personalization	11. Blame	

(Adapted from Burns, D. (1999). *Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy*. New York: Harper Collins)

Challenging Cognitive Distortions

Cognitive Distortions Definitions

1. **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 loser.
2. **Overgeneralization:** You see a single negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat.
3. **Mental Filter:** You pick out a single negative detail and dwell on it exclusively so that your vision of all reality becomes darkened, like the drop of ink that colors the entire beaker of water.
4. **Disqualifying the Positive:** You reject positive experiences by insisting they “don’t count” for one reason or other. Using this distortion can result in a person maintaining a negative belief even though it is contradicted by everyday experiences.
5. **Jumping to Conclusions:** You make a negative interpretation even though there are no definite facts that convincingly 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.
 - b. **Fortune Telling:** You anticipate that things will turn out badly, and you feel convinced that your prediction is an already established fact.
6. **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 fellow’s imperfections).
 - a. **Catastrophizing:** Seeing only the worst possible conclusion or outcome.
7. **Emotional Reasoning:** You assume that your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are: “I feel it; therefore, it must be true.”
8. **Should Statements:** You try to motivate yourself with “should” 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 toward others, you feel anger, frustration, and resentment.
9. **Labeling and Mislabeling:** This is an extreme form of overgeneralization. Instead of describing your error, you attach a negative label to yourself: “I’m a loser.” When someone else’s behavior rubs you the wrong way, you attach a negative label to him: “He’s a goddam louse.” Mislabeling involves describing an event with language that is highly colored and emotionally loaded.
10. **Personalization:** The belief that one is responsible for events outside of their own control. You feel responsible for other people’s happiness, and for their disappointments and struggles.
11. **Blame:** Making others responsible for how you feel. “You made me feel bad” is what usually defines this cognitive distortion. However, even when others engage in hurtful behaviors, you’re still in control of how you feel in most situations. The distortion comes from believing that others have the power to affect your life, even more so than yourself.