Cognitive Distortion Detective

This worksheet helps identify and challenge cognitive distortions-thought patterns that contribute to negative thinking and emotional distress.

1. Read the journal entries below and identify the cognitive distortion(s) within each.
2. Fill in the table with your own distressing thoughts and categorize the distortion(s).
3. Gather evidence for and against the thought.
4. Reframe the thought into a more balanced perspective.

Journal Entries:

- I completely embarrassed myself during the presentation. Everyone must think I'm incompetent.
- If I don't get everything perfect on this project, it's going to be a complete disaster.
- I made a mistake at work today. I always mess things up.
- My friend didn't text me back immediately. They must be mad at me.
- Even though I got a compliment on my work, I know they were just being nice.
- I failed one exam. I'm never going to be successful in life.
- I feel guilty for saying no to my coworker. That must mean I'm a selfish person.
- I should always be productive, or I am wasting my life.
- I got a B on my paper instead of an A. I'm such a failure.
- If I don't help my friend move, I'm a terrible person.
- I didn't get the promotion. Everything in my life is out of my control.
- If my partner forgets our anniversary, it's entirely their fault.
- Life should always be fair, or it's not worth trying.
- I work hard, so I should always be rewarded.
- If I keep reminding them, they will eventually change.
- I have to prove I'm right no matter what.
- Everyone else is more successful than I am.
- I had a terrible experience before, so it will happen again.
- I should have done things differently in the past.
- If something goes wrong, it must be my fault.

Distressing Thought	Cognitive Distortion

Evidence & Reframing:

- What evidence supports this thought?
- What evidence contradicts this thought?
- How can you reframe this thought into a more realistic or balanced perspective?

Common Cognitive Distortions:

1. All-or-Nothing Thinking - Viewing situations in black-and-white terms without middle ground.
2. Overgeneralization - Drawing broad conclusions from a single event or small sample.
3. Mental Filtering - Focusing only on negative details and ignoring positives.
4. Disqualifying the Positive - Rejecting positive experiences as unimportant or fake.
5. Jumping to Conclusions - Making assumptions without sufficient evidence.
    a. Mind Reading - Assuming you know what others are thinking.
    b. Fortune Telling - Predicting negative outcomes as if they are certain.
6. Magnification (Catastrophizing) or Minimization - Exaggerating negatives or downplaying positives.
7. Emotional Reasoning - Believing something must be true because you feel it strongly.
8. Should Statements - Placing rigid expectations on yourself or others.
9. Labeling and Mislabeling - Assigning extreme, unhelpful labels to yourself or others.
10. Personalization - Blaming yourself for external events beyond your control.
    2. Use this list to help identify distortions in the journal entries and your own thoughts.
11. Control Fallacies - Believing that you are either entirely responsible for everything or have no control at all.
12. Blaming - Holding others solely responsible for how you feel instead of recognizing your role.
13. Fallacy of Fairness - Expecting life to always be fair and feeling resentful when it's not.

14. Heaven's Reward Fallacy - Assuming that self-sacrifice will always be rewarded.
15. Change Fallacy - Expecting others to change if you pressure them enough.
16. Being Right - Feeling the need to always prove yourself correct, even at the expense of relationships.
17. Unrealistic Comparisons - Comparing yourself to others in an unfair or extreme way.
18. Memory Bias - Letting past negative experiences overly influence how you interpret current situations.
19. Regret Orientation - Constantly focusing on past mistakes and what you "should have" done.
20. Over-responsibility - Taking on excessive guilt or responsibility for things outside of your control.