

“Ways Your Thoughts Play Tricks on You!”

Distorted Thinking Increased Anxiety & Depression

- **Black & White Thinking:** There are only two categories for everything. You see things in terms of black & white, all or nothing, good or bad, smart or stupid, beautiful or ugly, etc. **It hard to see shades of gray.** This is the most common cognitive distortion & **forms the basis for perfectionism.**
- **Catastrophizing:** You greatly exaggerate the possible negative outcomes of an incident, illness or goof-up. A minor problem is inaccurately assumed to have catastrophic implications. **“You make a mountain out of a molehill!”** You magnify your imperfections & ability to cope, while minimizing your good points.
- **“Should” Statements:** You have a set of strict rules about how you or others should, should not, ought & must act (“musterbation”). You exaggerate the consequences if a rule is violated. **Quit “shoulding” on yourself or others!** The emotional consequence is self-loathing, shame & guilt. When directed towards others, you feel anger, frustration & resentment.
- **Personalization:** You feel too responsible [“This is all my fault!”]. You blame yourself for something negative, or for the inappropriate actions of others, when you had little or nothing to do with it. This is **the mother of crippling guilt!**
- **Labeling:** You engage in hostile, destructive name-calling by labeling yourself/others with highly coloured, emotionally-loaded global terms (e.g., “I’m stupid”, “an idiot”, “a loser”, “a jerk”, etc.).
- **Disqualifying the Positive:** You reject positive traits & experiences by insisting they “don’t count” for some reason. You have a mental filter in your mind that allows only negative viewpoints to be believed.
- **Jumping to Conclusions:** You assume you know what others are thinking or what their intentions are, without checking it out. You **“mind read”** & inaccurately assume they’re angry or reacting negatively to you (without any evidence). Or you **“fortune tell”** the future as full of misery or bad outcomes & inaccurately assume this is an established fact.
- **Emotional Reasoning:** You inaccurately believe that “If I feel it, it is true!” You assume that your negative thinking reflects the way things really are. **This can lead to procrastination** [“I’m not feeling energetic, so I might as well just lie in bed!”].
- **Overgeneralization:** You see a single negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat. It happened to you once, so it will always happen in the future [“Nothing good ever happens to me!”]. Feeling everyone is out to get you, when it may involve only one or two people.
- **The Spotlight Effect:** You are painfully self-conscious & overestimate the degree to which others notice or are watching you (inaccurately feeling you are always “in the spotlight”).
- **Post-mortem:** You “beat yourself up” emotionally by rehashing or ruminating about what you think happened (what you said or did) in a social situation. Your “post-mortem” self-abuse can last hours, weeks, months, even years -- often “rearing its ugly head” long after you have left a situation.

- **Feeling like an Imposter:** You doubt your skills, talents or accomplishments with a persistent inner fear of being exposed by others as a “fraud”, regardless of your success.

[Ellis, 1994; Burns, 1980; Fleming & Kocovski, 2013; Bourne, 2020]