

Common Cognitive Distortions

- 1. Mind reading.** You assume that you know what people think without having sufficient evidence of their thoughts. “He thinks I’m a loser.”
- 2. Fortune-telling.** You predict the future negatively: things will get worse, or there is danger ahead. “I’ll fail that exam,” or “I won’t get the job.”
- 3. Catastrophizing.** You believe that what has happened or will happen will be so awful and unbearable that you won’t be able to stand it. “It would be terrible if I failed.”
- 4. Labeling.** You assign global negative traits to yourself and others. “I’m undesirable,” or “He’s a rotten person.”
- 5. Discounting positives.** You claim that the positive things you or others do are trivial. “That’s what wives are supposed to do—so it doesn’t count when she’s nice to me,” or “Those successes were easy, so they don’t matter.”
- 6. Negative filtering.** You focus almost exclusively on the negatives and seldom notice the positives. “Look at all of the people who don’t like me.”
- 7. Overgeneralizing.** You perceive a global pattern of negatives on the basis of a single incident. “This generally happens to me. I seem to fail at a lot of things.”
- 8. Dichotomous thinking.** You view events or people in all-or-nothing terms. “I get rejected by everyone,” or “It was a complete waste of time.”
- 9. Blaming.** You focus on the other person as the source of your negative feelings, and you refuse to take responsibility for changing yourself. “She’s to blame for the way I feel now,” or “My parents caused all my problems.”
- 10. What if?** You keep asking a series of questions about “what if” something happens, and you fail to be satisfied with any of the answers. “Yeah, but what if I get anxious?,” or “What if I can’t catch my breath?”
- 11. Emotional reasoning.** You let your feelings guide your interpretation of reality. “I feel depressed; therefore, my marriage is not working out.”
- 12. Inability to disconfirm.** You reject any evidence or arguments that might contradict your negative thoughts. For example, when you have the thought I’m unlovable, you reject as irrelevant any evidence that people like you. Consequently, your thought cannot be refuted. “That’s not the real issue. There are deeper problems. There are other factors.”