

## Common Cognitive Distortions

- All or Nothing Thinking:** You see things in black and white categories or think that unless something is perfect, it's a failure.
  - **Example:** "I wanted to work out every day this week. Now that I've missed a day, I've failed, so I might as well give up."
- Overgeneralization:** When one thing goes wrong, you think that everything will always go wrong.
  - **Look out for:** *never, always, all, every, none, no one, everyone, etc.*
  - **Example:** "I didn't get that job I was hoping for. I just know I will never get what I want out of life."
- Mental filter:** Focusing on one negative part of a situation (or yourself) and ignoring any positive aspects.
  - **Look out for:** *worthless, pointless, hopeless, stupid, failure, unfair, etc.*
  - **Example:** "I messed up a corner of my drawing so it's pointless to finish it."
- Disqualifying the Positive:** You insist that positive experiences "don't count" for one reason or another, which allows you to maintain a negative belief that is contradicted by your experience.
  - **Example:** "I only did well on my exam because the teacher went easy on us."
- Jumping to Conclusions:** You make a negative assumption despite lack of evidence to support your conclusion. There are two variations of this cognitive distortion:
  - **Mind Reading:** You assume that someone thinks the worst of you or doesn't like you.
    - **Example:** "She thinks I'm an idiot."
  - **Fortune-Telling:** You predict that things will not go well and feel sure that this is a certainty.
    - **Example:** "I will never be able to finish school."
- Magnification or Minimization:** You exaggerate how important some things are (such as your mistakes or someone else's accomplishments) or you minimize some things until they appear insignificant (such as your own accomplishments).
  - **Example:** "I may have gotten the job, but it was really no big deal."
- Catastrophizing:** You assume that the worst-case scenario will happen and that you won't be able to cope with the results.
  - **Example:** "I'm going to mess up at my job, everyone will think I'm an idiot, and I won't be able to handle the embarrassment."
- Emotional Reasoning:** You assume that your emotions reflect the way things really are: "I feel this way, therefore it must be true."
  - **Example:** "I feel like no one likes me, so that must be true."
  - **Example:** "I feel like I will never get better, so that must be true."
- Should Statements:** You keep telling yourself what you or others "should" and "shouldn't" do, think, or feel. *Should Statements* aimed towards yourself can lead to feelings of guilt. *Should statements* aimed at others can lead to resentment, frustration, or anger.
  - **Look out for:** *should, shouldn't, must, need to*
  - **Example:** "I shouldn't feel upset about this."
  - **Exceptions to Should Statements:** there are absolutely times when "should" is a valid thing to say.
    - *Moral shoulds* (ex: "You should not kill people.")
    - *Legal shoulds* (ex: "You should not rob a bank.")
    - *Laws-of-the-universe shoulds* (ex: "If I drop this pen right now, it should fall.")
- Labeling:** An extreme form of *Overgeneralization* where you attach a negative label to yourself or others.
  - **Look out for:** *loser, failure, stupid, pathetic, worthless, hopeless, idiot, etc.*
  - **Example:** "I'm a loser."
- Personalization:** You believe that you are the cause of some negative situation, which in fact you are not primarily responsible for (or at all responsible for).
  - **Example:** "It's all my fault that my friend is in a bad mood."
- If Thoughts:** These thoughts usually start with either "What if...?" or "If only..." These kinds of thoughts can feed into anxiety or depression, respectively. In either case, *If Thoughts* put our focus on something that is currently out of our control, either because it hasn't happened yet, or it already happened in the past.
  - **Example:** "What if it all goes wrong?"
  - **Example:** "If only I hadn't messed that up."