

Cognitive distortions

When evaluating your automatic thoughts, it is useful to consider these common errors in thinking, known as cognitive distortions

- 1) **All or nothing thinking** (black and white thinking, polarised thinking). Things fall into absolute categories with no middle ground. Either you are perfect or you are a total failure. "I got a B in my exam so I am a failure"
- 2) **Overgeneralisation.** A single negative event is turned into a general, universal rule. If you failed once, you will always fail. "I always stuff up", "I never get it right", "Nobody likes me"
- 3) **Filtering.** You selectively pay attention to the negative and discount anything positive. You focus on the one small criticism someone made and ignore the five compliments they just gave you.
- 4) **Jumping to conclusions.** You make a negative interpretation of events even though there are no definite facts to support your conclusion.
 - a) **Mind-reading** (projection). You assume everyone thinks the same as you do. You assume someone is reacting negatively to you but don't check it out. Someone yawns and you think you are boring them (they are probably just tired!)
 - b) **Fortune-telling** You anticipate that things will turn out badly and treat it as fact.
- 5) **Magnification (catastrophising)/minimisation.** You exaggerate your faults and other's achievements, or diminish your qualities and someone else's imperfections.
- 6) **Emotional reasoning.** You assume that your negative emotions reflect the way things really are ("I feel it so it must be true"). I feel inadequate so I must be useless.
- 7) **Shoulds.** You try to motivate yourself with "should" and "must" statements. These have the effect of making you feel guilty (if the should is aimed at yourself), or angry (if the should is aimed at someone else)
- 8) **Labelling.** You attach a global negative label to yourself or other people, instead of describing the specific behaviour/feature. "I am an idiot". "He is useless". "My house is a pigsty".
- 9) **Personalisation.** You see yourself as the cause of some external negative event even though in reality you were not responsible for it, or you assume that everything is to do with you. Eg friend gets herself in trouble and you feel it is your fault. "It is something I did/said".