



Distorted Thoughts

All-or-Nothing Thinking – Instead of viewing a situation or a solution on a spectrum, only opposing choices or perceptions are considered. Also known as “black-and-white” thinking or absolute thinking. “I am either on a diet and seriously restricting or I am off a diet and binging.”

Overgeneralization – A single negative event is a never-ending pattern of defeat. “I failed this test, so I will never do well on tests.”

Mental Filter – Dwelling on a negative part of something so much that it taints the entire perception of it. “My mother and father got into an argument at my wedding. My entire wedding was terrible.”

Disqualifying the positive – Dismiss positive experiences by insisting they “don’t count” to maintain a negative belief that is contradicted by everyday experiences. “I had a 4.0 in college, but I went to an easy college, so I know that I am not that smart.”

Jumping to conclusions – Forming a negative interpretation or prediction despite the absence of facts that support the conclusion.

Mind reading – Draw a conclusion that another’s thoughts, usually negative and personalized, are known.

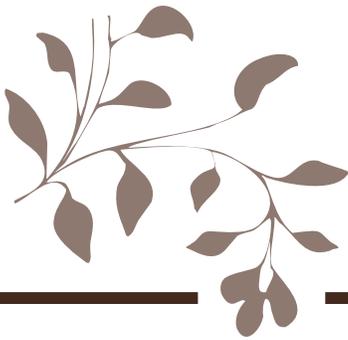
“I know that he didn’t like my presentation because I saw him yawn while I was talking.”

The fortune teller error – Anticipation and conviction that things will turn out badly.

“I am certain that he is going to break up with me because he didn’t respond to my last text.”

Magnification (Catastrophizing) or Minimization – aka “The Binocular Trick” – Exaggerating or minimizing the importance of one’s own or another’s accomplishments, mistakes, achievements, positive/negative qualities. “He rages and threatens me, but it’s not that big of a deal.” “He gave me a dirty look. I’ve been bullied.”

Emotional Reasoning – The assumption that negative emotions are a reflection of reality. “I was really upset at the way she disciplined her child. She is a terrible mother.”



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Should Statements – Telling the self that there is a proper way to think/believe/ behave and that deviating from it is shameful and deserving of negative, guilty, angry, resentful, frustrated feelings. “I should not eat this” = “Shame on me for eating this.” “They should not be dating.” Also, “must” and “ought” fall into this category.

Labeling and Mislabeled – An extreme form of overgeneralization in which one labels oneself in a deprecating manner: “I’m a loser.” “I’m so fat.” When directed at others the mislabel is usually extreme, exaggerated, provocative and colored. “She is a whore.”

Personalization – Taking on personal responsibility for something. “He didn’t respond to my text. He is upset with me.” “She didn’t smile when she saw me. She doesn’t like me.”

Adapted from David Burns, PhD. Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy Revised and updated.