



## **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.*