

## Cognitive Distortions

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1. **All-or-nothing thinking** – You see things in black or white categories. If your performance falls short of perfect you see yourself as a total failure.

Example: A straight A student who receives a B on an exam concludes, “Now I’m a total failure.”

2. **Overgeneralization** – You see a single negative event as a never ending pattern of defeat.

Example: When one woman declined a date, the man concluded, “I’m never going to get a date. No one will ever want me.”

3. **Mental filter** – You pick out a single negative detail and dwell on it exclusively, thus perceiving that the whole situation is negative and filtering out the positive.

Example: in a 20 minute oral presentation, for 2 minutes you lose your concentration and feel you are rambling. Because of this you think, “I gave a horrible presentation,” discounting that for 18 of the 20 minutes you performed well.

4. **Disqualifying the positive** – An individual transforms neutral or even positive experiences into negative ones. You reject positive experiences by insisting they “don’t count” for some reason or the other. In this way you can maintain a negative belief that is contradicted by your everyday experiences.

Example: When someone praises your appearance or your work, you tell yourself, “They’re just being nice” or you say to them, “It was nothing really.”

5. **Jumping to Conclusion** – You make a negative interpretation even though there are no definite facts that convincingly support your conclusion.

- a. **Mind reading** – You arbitrarily conclude that someone is reacting negatively to you and you don’t bother to check it out.

Example: Your spouse is upset about work and is quiet at home. You think, “She’s mad at me. What did I do wrong?”

- b. **Fortune Teller Error** – You anticipate things will turn out badly and you feel convinced that your prediction is an already established fact.

Example: You call your friend who doesn’t get back to you. You don’t call back and check out why because you say to yourself “He’ll think I’m being obnoxious if I call again. I’ll make a fool of myself.” You avoid your friend, feel put down and find out he never got your message.

6. **Magnification (Catastrophizing) or Minimization** – You exaggerate the importance of things (such as your mistakes or someone else’s achievement), or you inappropriately

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shrink things until they appear tiny (your own desirable qualities or the other person's imperfections).

Example of Magnification: A student answers a professor's question incorrectly and thinks, "How awful. Now he thinks I'm stupid and I'll fail this class, never graduate and never get a good job."

7. **Emotional Reasoning** – You assume that your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are. "I feel it, therefore it must be true."

Example: "I feel stupid, therefore I am stupid." "I feel overwhelmed and hopeless, therefore my problems must be impossible to solve."

8. **Should Statements** – You try to motivate yourself with should and shouldn'ts as if you have to be whipped and punished before you could be expected to do anything. Musts and oughts are also offenders. The emotional consequence is guilt. When you direct should statements at others you feel anger, frustration and resentment.

Example: "I should have gotten all the questions right," causes feelings of guilt. "He should have been on time," causes feelings of resentment, anger and frustration.

9. **Labeling and Mislabeled** – An extreme form of overgeneralization. Instead of describing your error, you attach a negative label to yourself. When someone else's behavior rubs you the wrong way, you attach a negative label to that person.

Mislabeled involves describing an event with language that is highly colored and emotionally loaded.

Example: You miss a basketball shot and say, "I'm a born loser" instead of saying, "I messed up on that one shot."

10. **Personalization** – You see yourself as the cause of some negative external event which in fact you were not primarily responsible for. It causes you to feel extreme guilty.

Example: A father sees his child's report card with a note from the teacher indicating the child isn't working well. He immediately replies, "I must be a bad father. This shows how I've failed."