# Cognitive Distortions

## (Ten Core Negative Thinking Patterns)

1.  **All-or-nothing thinking**: This type of thinking involves seeing things as being all good or all bad.  For example, if your performance falls short of perfect, you see yourself as a total failure.   This type of thinking causes people to see things as being the extremes of either great or horrible. This kind of negative thinking is also called *black-and-white* thinking or *dichotomous* thinking.

2. **Overgeneralization**: You see a single negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat.   If you have failed at something in the past you believe that there is no use in trying because you will only fail again.

3. **Mental filter**: This type of thinking involves focusing on negative things so much that they become almost the only things an individual thinks about.  When an individual focuses so much on the negative his/her vision of all reality becomes darkened, like the drop of ink that discolors the entire glass of water.  We tend to find that for which we look, so if I am looking for why I am depressed my mind will tend to focus on all of the negative things in my life.

4. **Disqualifying the positive**: This type of thinking occurs when an individual thinks that the good things in his/her life don't count or really matter.  When an individual thinks this way he/she disrespects the good things in his/her life.  This type of thinking makes it seem that the good things in your life don't really matter.

5. **Jumping to conclusions**: You make a negative interpretation and/or judgment even though there are no definite facts that convincingly support your conclusion.  In other words, you jump to a negative interpretation without having actual evidence to support your conclusion.  There are two types of jumping to conclusions:

    a. **Mind reading**: You think or assume that someone is reacting negatively to you even though you don't actually know what they are thinking.

    b.   **The Fortune Teller Error**: You anticipate or predict that in the future that things will turn out badly and feel convinced that your prediction is an already-established fact.

6. **Catastrophizing**: When you think something is a full-blown catastrophe when in reality it is not.  This type of thing involves using words like <u>horrible</u> or <u>terrible</u> to describe an event.  It also makes problems like they are bigger than we can handle by thinking things like, "<u>I can't stand it.</u>" When our thinking is exaggerated it is like pouring gasoline on a fire—it only makes the problem and the negative emotional reaction worse.  Try using a catastrophe scale of 1-100 to determine how bad a problem is in reality.  A score of 100 might be something like the 40 million people who died in Europe during World War II.  Keep in mind that most things are not actually catastrophes.  When you keep things in perspective your emotions stay in perspective.

7. **Emotional reasoning**: You assume that your negative emotions are an accurate reflection the way things really are: "I feel it, therefore it must be true."  Our emotions are not necessarily an accurate guide to reality—especially if an individual is depressed, manic, angry, and/or anxious. Just because we feel something doesn't make it true.

8. **Should statements**: You try to motivate yourself with "*should*" and "*shouldn'ts*", as if you had 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 toward others, you feel anger, frustration, and resentment.

9. **Labeling and mislabeling**: This happens when we start using swear words or insulting language in our thinking to describe either ourselves or others. Instead of describing your error, you attach a negative label to yourself: "I'm a loser." When someone else's behavior rubs you the wrong way, you attach a negative label to him, "He's a #!&#@ idiot." Mislabeling involves describing an event with language that is highly colored and emotionally loaded.

10. **Personalization or Errors in Blaming**: You see yourself or others as the cause of some negative external event for which, in fact, you/they were not actually responsible.  This happens when you inappropriately blame yourself or others for things.  This causes you to get depressed or angry at yourself or others.