

# COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

Tendencies or patterns of thinking or beliefs that are false or inaccurate and can potentially cause psychological damage.



## All-or-Nothing Thinking / Polarized Thinking

Also known as "Black-and-White Thinking," this distortion refers to the inability or unwillingness to see shades of gray. In other words, seeing things in terms of extremes – something is either fantastic or awful, either perfect or a total failure.

## Over generalization

Taking one instance or example and generalizing it to an overall pattern or assuming all experiences and people are the same, based on one negative experience.



## Jumping to Conclusions – Mind Reading

Inaccurate belief that we know what another person is thinking. It is possible to have an idea of what other people are thinking, but this distortion refers to the negative interpretations that we jump to, such as seeing a stranger with an unpleasant expression and jumping to the conclusion that she is thinking something negative about us.

## Mental Filtering

Focusing solely on the negative and excluding all the positive. An example of this distortion is one partner in a romantic relationship dwelling on a single negative comment made by the other partner and viewing the relationship as hopelessly lost, while ignoring the years of positive comments and experiences.



## Discounting the positive

Acknowledging positive experiences but rejecting them instead of embracing them, even in the face of lots of evidence to the contrary. For example, a person who receives a positive review at work might reject the idea that he is a competent employee and attribute the positive review to political correctness.

## Fortune Telling

The tendency to make conclusions and predictions based on little to no evidence and holding them as gospel truth. One example of fortune-telling is a young, single woman predicting that she will never find love or have a committed and happy relationship based only on the fact that she has not found it yet.



## Magnification (Catastrophizing) or Minimization

Also known as the "Binocular Trick", this distortion involves exaggerating the importance or meaning of things or minimizing the importance or meaning of things.

## Emotional reasoning

This may be one of the most important to identify and address. Emotional reasoning refers to the acceptance of one's emotions as fact. It can be described as "I feel it, therefore it must be true." Of course, we know this isn't a reasonable belief, but it is a common one nonetheless.



## Should statements

Holding tight to your personal rules on how people ought to behave. Should statements are statements that you make to yourself about what you "should" do, what you "ought" to do, or what you "must" do. They can also be applied to others, imposing a set of expectations that will likely not be met. The result is often guilt and disappointment.

## Labeling and Mislabeling

Generalizing one or two instances into an overall judgment, using exaggerated and emotionally loaded language. Mislabeling refers to the application of highly emotional, loaded language when labeling. These tendencies are basically extreme forms of overgeneralization, in which we assign judgments of value to ourselves or to others based on one instance or experience.



## Personalization

Taking everything personally or assigning blame to yourself for no logical reason to believe you are to blame, such as assuming you are the reason a friend did not enjoy the girl's night out because of you, or the more severe examples of believing that you are the cause for every instance of moodiness or irritation in those around you.

## Control Fallacies

Thinking everything that happens to you is either all your fault or not at all your fault. A control fallacy manifests as one of two beliefs: (1) that we have no control over our lives and are helpless victims of fate, or (2) that we are in complete control of ourselves and our surroundings, giving us responsibility for the feelings of those around us.



## Blaming

Pointing to others when looking for a cause of any negative event, instead of looking at yourself.

## Fallacy of Fairness

While we would all probably prefer to operate in a world that is fair, this assumption is not based on reality and can foster negative feelings when we are faced with proof of life's unfairness. A person who judges every experience by its perceived fairness has fallen for this fallacy, and will likely feel anger, resentment, and hopelessness when he inevitably encounters a situation that is not fair.



## Fallacy of Change

Expecting others to change if we pressure or encourage them enough. This distortion is usually accompanied by a belief that our happiness and success rests on other people, leading us to believe that forcing those around us to change is the only way to get what we want.

## Always being right

Believing that it is absolutely unacceptable to be wrong. Perfectionists and those struggling with Imposter Syndrome will recognize this distortion – it is the belief that we must always be right, correct, or accurate. With this distortion, the idea that we could be wrong is absolutely unacceptable, and we will fight to the metaphorical death to prove that we are right.



## Heaven's Reward Fallacy

Believing that any good act on your part will be repaid or rewarded. This distortion manifests as a belief that one's struggles, one's suffering, and one's hard work will result in a just reward. Sometimes no matter how hard we work or how much we sacrifice; we will not achieve what we hope to achieve and to think otherwise is a potentially damaging pattern of thought.