

15 Different “Thinking Errors”

We all engage in cognitive distortions, especially under stress or when feeling the need to protect ourselves. The key is to become aware of when we are doing it and then try to stop.

- 1. Filtering:** You take negative details and magnify them while filtering out all positive aspects of a situation.
- 2. Polarized Thinking:** You see things as black and white, good or bad. You believe you have to be perfect or you are a failure. There is no middle ground.
- 3. Overgeneralization:** You come to a general conclusion based on a single incident or piece of evidence. If something bad happens once, you expect it to happen over and over again.
- 4. Mind Reading:** You think you know what people are feeling and why they act the way they do without their saying or doing anything. In particular, you believe you are able to divine how people are feeling toward you.
- 5. Catastrophizing:** You expect disaster. You notice or hear about a problem and start thinking “What if ... “ For example: “What if tragedy strikes? What if it happens to me?”
- 6. Personalization:** Thinking that everything people do or say is some kind of reaction to you. You also compare yourself to others, trying to determine who is smarter, better looking, etc.
- 7. Fallacies of Control:** If you feel externally controlled, you see yourself as helpless, a victim of fate or controlled by others. The fallacy of internal control is when you believe that you are responsible for the pain and happiness of everyone around you.
- 8. Fallacy of Fairness:** You feel resentful because you think you know what’s fair but other people won’t agree with you. You become upset when something “isn’t fair”.
- 9. Blaming:** You hold other people responsible for your pain, or take the other tack and blame yourself for every problem.
- 10. Shoulds:** You have a list of ironclad rules about how you and other people should act. People who break the rules leave you feeling angry and you feel guilty if you violate the rules.
- 11. Emotional Reasoning:** You believe that what you feel must be automatically true. If you feel stupid and boring, then you must be stupid and boring.
- 12. Fallacy of Change:** You expect that other people will change to suit you if you just pressure or cajole them enough. You believe that you need to change other people because your hopes for happiness seem to depend on them entirely.
- 13. Global Labeling:** You generalize one or two qualities into a negative global judgment.
- 14. Being Right:** You are continually on trial to prove that your opinions and actions are correct. Being wrong is unthinkable and you will go to any length to demonstrate your rightness.
- 15. Heaven’s Reward Fallacy:** You expect all your sacrifice and self-denial to pay off, as if there were someone keeping score. You feel bitter when the reward doesn’t come.