

THE 12 MOST COMMON THINKING MISTAKES

(ALSO CALLED AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS OR COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS)

Although some negative automatic thoughts are true, many are either untrue or have just a grain of truth. Here are a few common errors.

1. All-or-nothing thinking (also called black-and-white, polarized, or dichotomous thinking): You view a situation in only two categories instead of on a continuum.

Example: "If I'm not a total success, I'm a failure."

2. Catastrophizing (also called fortune telling): You predict the future negatively without considering other, more likely outcomes.

Example: "I'll be so upset I won't be able to function at all."

3. Disqualifying or discounting the positive: You unreasonably tell yourself that positive experiences, deeds, or qualities do not count.

Example: "I did that project well, but that doesn't mean I'm competent; I just got lucky."

4. Emotional reasoning: You think something must be true because you "feel" (actually believe) it so strongly, ignoring or discounting evidence to the contrary.

Example: "I know I do a lot of things well at work, but I still feel as if I'm a failure."

5. Labeling: You put a fixed, global label on yourself or others without considering that the evidence might more reasonably lead to a less disastrous conclusion.

Examples: "I'm a loser. He's no good."

6. Magnification/minimization: When you evaluate yourself, another person, or a situation, you unreasonably magnify the negative and/or minimize the positive.

Examples: "Getting a mediocre evaluation proves how inadequate I am. Getting high marks doesn't mean I'm smart."

7. Mental filter (also called selective abstraction): You pay undue attention to one negative detail instead of seeing the whole picture.

Example: "Because I got one low rating on my evaluation [which also contained several high ratings] it means I'm doing a lousy job."

8. Mind reading: You believe you know what others' motivations are, or what they are thinking, failing to consider other, more likely possibilities.

Example: "He's thinking that I don't know the first thing about this project."

9. Overgeneralization (also called global thinking): You make a sweeping negative conclusion that goes far beyond the current situation.

Example: "[Because I felt uncomfortable at the meeting] I don't have what it takes to make friends."

10. Personalization: You believe others are behaving negatively because of you, without considering more plausible explanations for their behavior.

Example: "The repairman was curt to me because I did something wrong."

11. "Should" and "must" statements (also called imperatives): You have a precise, fixed idea of how you or others should behave and you overestimate how bad it is that these expectations are not met.

Example: "It's terrible that I made a mistake. That mistake was disastrous. I should never make a mistake."

12. Tunnel vision: You only see the negative aspects of a situation.

Example: "My son's teacher can't do anything right. He's critical and insensitive and lousy at teaching."

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