

## Cognitive Distortions

### *The Thoughts to Watch Out For*

These are the top 10 ways of thinking that lead people to react to life's circumstances with a feeling of being down. Do you do any of these? The answer is yes- we all do. Notice which ones you're most likely to use. The more you are able to label what you are doing, the more you realize you can choose a different thought, one that might make you feel better.

**OVERGENERALIZATION:** You see a single negative event as an ever-ending pattern of defeat. If a bird craps on your window, you think that they are always crapping on your window, ignoring the many days that they haven't.

**DISQUALIFYING THE POSITIVE:** You reject positive experiences by insisting they "don't count" for some reason or other. Someone giving you a compliment is 'just being nice'. This allows you to maintain a negative belief even if it is contradicted.

**ALL-OR-NOTHING THINKING:** You see things in black-or-white categories. For example, if your performance falls short of perfect, you see yourself as a total failure.

**MENTAL FILTER:** You pick out a single negative detail and dwell on it exclusively so that your vision of all reality becomes darkened, like the drop of ink that discolors the entire beaker of water.

**JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS:** You make a negative interpretation even though there are no definite facts that convincingly support your conclusion. This is done through mind reading- (you assume the motivation behind someone's actions) and fortune telling- (you assume a negative outcome for an event)

**CATASTROPHIZING:** You exaggerate the importance of things (such as your goof-up or someone else's achievement), or you inappropriately shrink things until they appear tiny (your own desirable qualities or the other's imperfections). This is also called "the binocular trick."

**EMOTIONAL REASONING:** You assume that your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are: "I feel it, therefore it must be true." "I feel fat so I must be fat" or "I feel depressed so there must be something wrong"

**SHOULD STATEMENTS:** You try to motivate yourself with should and shouldn't, as if you had to be whipped and punished before you could be expected to do anything. "Musts" and "oughts" are also offenders.

**LABELING:** instead of describing an error, you attach a label- "I'm a loser", "she's a jerk".

**PERSONALIZATION:** you assume yourself to be responsible for an outside event. You confuse influence with control. (my child got an F because I am a terrible mother).

*-Adapted from Feeling Good, David Burns, M.D, Avon Books, 1999. An excellent and easily utilized resource for understanding and applying cognitive therapy techniques.*