

Anxious Thinking Traps

1. **Probability Overestimations** – a prediction that what a person believes is likely to come true, even though the actual likelihood is relatively low.
 - *Everyone will notice I am anxious and they will think I am not able to do my job.*
 - *I am late so the entire group is going to think that I am irresponsible and cannot be trusted.*
2. **Mind Reading** – Making negative assumptions about what other people are thinking, particularly about you.
 - *They don't think that I am capable of doing this, they think I am hopeless.*
 - *They looked at me funny so they must think I am stupid.*
 - *She did not respond to my text, she thinks I am not worthwhile of her time.*
3. **Fortune Telling** - Predicting that things will turn out badly. But, in reality, we cannot predict the future because we do not have a crystal ball.
 - *I am never going to be able to pull this off.*
 - *I am never able to stick to my healthy lifestyle choice.*
 - *I should have never got into this, I am way over my head and I am going to blow it.*
 - *It is clear that I am going to screw these kids up, it is written in the stars.*
4. **Should Statements** – Incorrect or exaggerated assumptions about the ways things should be. Words like always, never, must – relate to perfectionistic expectations for oneself.
 - *I should never feel nervous at work.*
 - *I should eat better - all of the time.*
 - *I have must get a high performance rating or I am failing.*
 - *I never figure our time management.*
 - *I ought to have figured out childcare by now, what is wrong with me.*
5. **Catastrophic Thinking** – Tendency to assume that if negative event were to occur, it would be absolutely terrible and unmanageable.
 - *My credibility will be lost if I mess this up.*
 - *I will never get another job if I get fired.*
 - *People will stop wanting to associate with me if I don't keep up appearances.*
 - *If I don't make the team I will be an outcast.*
 - *If I lose this race, I will never win again.*
 - *If I don't figure out what to do with my life by the end of the month, I am going to be lost forever.*

6. **All or Nothing Thinking** – tendency to judge any performance that falls short of perfectionism to be absolutely terrible.
- *I had one terrible eating day, so I must be unable to manage this new lifestyle. The evidence is clear; I am not able to do this.*
 - *I have not been the gym in three days; I am never going to make my goals and objectives.*
 - *My house is always a mess I can never keep up with how I want it to look (like the magazine).*
7. **Selective Attention** – Tendency to pay attention to certain types information than other
- *Ignoring positive feedback and overly focusing on the negative.*
 - *Focusing on a mistake instead of numerous wins.*
 - *Looking for personal flaws to keep the negative self-narrative running.*

Strategies

Examine The Evidence – It is important to recognize that your anxious thoughts are not facts. Rather than assuming that your beliefs are true, it is important to treat your anxious thoughts as hunches. Examine the evidence to assess if you hunch is true. It usually is not.

Challenging Catastrophic Thinking – Shift focus from how terrible a particular outcome would be to how you might manage or cope with the situation if it were to occur. Important to ask the following questions:

- *So what? What would be the worst thing if this happened?*
- *What if my fears actually come true?*
- *How can I cope with (the situation) if it were to come true?*
- *Will I care about this a month from now? A year?*

Remembering Your Strengths & Positive Attributes - Most of us are above average in some dimensions, below average in some other dimensions, and well within average range in most dimensions. Natural tendency is to focus on the areas in which you feel you do not measure up, thus important to recognize the dimensions in which you excel or are happy with. Keep a list of some of your strengths as reminders.

Seeing With Another's Perspective

To challenge overly harsh standards that you may hold for yourself, try to see the issue from another perspective. Imagine someone else (a close friend, loved one) is experiencing the anxiety. What might you tell him or her? Taking the perspective of a close friend may help challenge your own anxious thoughts. Practice self-compassion (= self-kindness, common humanity, mindfulness).

Cost-Benefit Analysis - Helpful to consider if your thoughts and behaviors are helping you:

- *Describe anxious thought or prediction.*
- *List the benefits of having that anxious thought*
- *List the cost of having that anxious thought.*
- *Ask yourself if the thought is serving you.*

Monitor Thoughts, Feelings, and Behaviors - Bringing anxious thoughts, feelings, behaviors into conscious awareness help you to recognize when habitual patterns are starting.

- *Use monitoring sheets, lists or journals to keep track*
- *Identify alternative ways of thinking*

Form for Evaluating Anxious / Critical Thoughts

Anxious / Critical Thought:	
Am I falling into a negative thinking trap?	
1) What is the evidence that thought is true? 2) What is the evidence that this thought is not true? 3) What is the possibility (percentage 0-100%) that this will come true? 4)	
Have I confused a thought with a fact?	

What would I tell a friend if he/ she had the same thought?	
What is the worst that could happen?	
If it did happen, what would I do to cope with or handle it? Is my judgement based on the way I feel instead of facts?	
Am I confusing "possibility" with "certainty" (it may be possible but is it likely?)	
Is this a hassle or a horror?	