



10 COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

Black and White Thinking / All Or Nothing Thinking: Learning to see shades of grey is immensely useful and we can appreciate that there is a middle ground.

ie "I always get anxious when driving." Recognising that you only sometimes get anxious when driving can be a relief, as there are also times when you don't feel so anxious.

Overgeneralisation: Seeing a pattern based on a single event, or being overly broad in the conclusions we draw, can blind us to the reality of the situation.

ie "Nothing good ever happens to me." Ask yourself, "Nothing? Really?" and you will generally find evidence that this thought pattern is not valid.

Mental Filter: When we only pay attention to certain types of evidence and don't register the bigger picture. We may choose to pick out the negative detail, dwell on it exclusively and ignore any positives.

ie "The traffic jam ruined my entire day", even though you may have also enjoyed a phone call from a good friend and caught up with the kids over dinner.

Disqualifying the Positives: By discounting or rejecting the good things that happen to us, we can feel anxious even when we achieve something great. We may believe something positive was pure luck alone and do not give ourselves the credit we deserve.

ie "The A* I received in Maths was a fluke, so doesn't count". Yes, it still counts!

Jumping to Conclusions/Mindreading: When we believe we can guess what someone else is thinking, or feeling, when they may not be thinking that at all.

ie we feel hurt if someone ignores us or doesn't return a call when the reality is most likely that they didn't see us or are tied up with something else at that precise moment. It is usually nothing to do with us at all!

Fortune Telling: When we think we can predict the future, as a result of something that has influenced our past.

ie if we didn't get the last three jobs we applied for, we can start "predicting" that we won't get the next few jobs we apply for either, and we may give up trying. The reality is that no one gets accepted for every job, and eventually, if we keep putting ourselves out there, we will be successful.

Magnification and Minimisation: This is when we magnify the importance of errors as evidence of the truth ie "I took the wrong turn and it was an absolute disaster," or we minimise a compliment we receive because we think it is undeserved or the person paying the compliment didn't really mean it. We may tell ourselves they were just being nice! Notice we don't normally apply the same logic if we receive perceived negative feedback!

Labelling and Mislabelling: We may label ourselves as "terrible" at something such as public speaking, based on an incident that happened many many years ago, and avoid speaking in front of an audience from there on, or we may take one particular situation, such as burning the toast, and label ourselves based on that situation alone. "I am such an idiot". No, the reality is you just burnt the toast, that does not make you an idiot!

Catastrophising: When we think of events as catastrophes instead of acknowledging the reality of the situation.

ie Your boss asks you to come to her office. You then assume she is going to fire you, resulting in you not being able to afford the mortgage, the house will be repossessed, your partner will leave and take the kids and you will spend the rest of your life alone. The reality was, she had a simple question about a report you have completed!

Should and Must Statements: Using critical words like "should" and "must" can put a lot of pressure on us and make us feel guilty, or like we have already failed before we have started.

ie "I should clean the car this Sunday" when really we have no desire to clean the car and would rather have a day with our family. Could you make a conscious decision not to do it? This takes away the guilt immediately!