

DEFINITION OF COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

Cognitive distortions are logical, but they are not rational. They can create real difficulty with your thinking. See if you are doing any of the ten common distortions that people use. Rate yourself from one to ten with one being low and ten being high. Ask yourself if you can stop using the distortions and think in a different way.

ALL-OR-NOTHING THINKING: You see things in black-and-white categories. If your performance falls short of perfect, you see your self as a total failure.

OVERGENERALIZATION: You see a single negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat.

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 discolours the entire beaker of water.

DISQUALIFYING THE POSITIVE: You reject positive experiences by insisting they "don't count" for some reason or other. In this way you can maintain a negative belief that is contradicted by your everyday experiences.

JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS: You make a negative interpretation even though there are no definite facts that convincingly support your conclusion.

MIND READING: You arbitrarily conclude that someone is reacting negatively to you, and you don't bother to check this out.

THE FORTUNETELLER ERROR: you can anticipate that things will turn out badly, and you feel convinced that your prediction is an already-established fact.

MAGNIFICATION (CATASTROPHIZING) OR MINIMIZATION: 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 other fellow'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."

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. The emotional consequences are guilt. When you direct should statements toward others, you feel anger, frustration, and resentment.

LABELING AND MISLABELING: This is an extreme form of overgeneralization. Instead of describing your error, you attach a negative label to yourself. "I'm a loser." When someone else's behavior rubs you the wrong way, you attach a negative label to him "He's a Goddamn louse." Mislabeling involves describing an event with language that is highly colored and emotionally loaded.

PERSONALIZATION: You see your self as the cause of some negative external event, which in fact you were not primarily responsible for.