

CHALLENGING NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

APRIL 27TH, 2020

We go about our daily lives thinking about and interpreting the situations we are in. This is called self-talk and it includes our conscious thoughts (things we actively think about) and our unconscious beliefs and bias (things that are ingrained in us that we may not necessarily think about actively).



TYPES OF SELF-TALK

**MOST OF THE TIME
OUR SELF-TALK IS
REASONABLE**

"I should probably get started on this assignment."

"I'm really looking forward to this TV show."

**SOME OF OUR SELF-TALK CAN BE
NEGATIVE**

"What's the point of studying?
I'm going to fail for sure!"

"Things will never get better."
"I'm useless."

If our self-talk is often skewed towards the negatives, our mood and mental health can suffer. Likewise, our mental health can impact the way we talk to ourselves. If you're experiencing depression, for instance, you might often interpret things more negatively than they truly are.



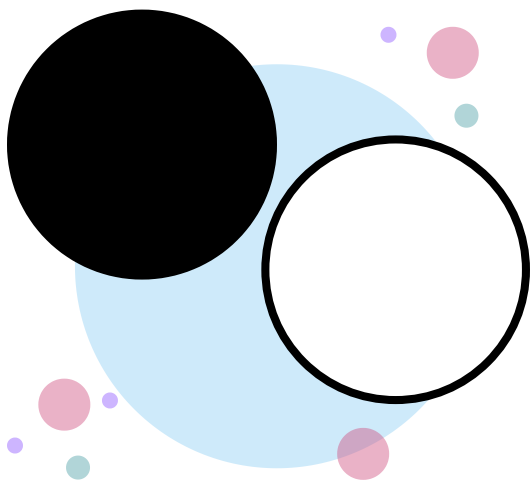
TEST, CHALLENGE, & CHANGE

You can change your negative thoughts by challenging irrational parts of your thinking. Observe your thoughts and identifying when you are engaging in negative thinking patterns. Then, actively challenge the irrational parts by replacing them with more reasonable thoughts.

Learning to do this might take time and practice, but it's worth the effort! Try to stop and become aware of your thoughts when you experience depression, anger, or anxiety. Use your feelings as cues to reflect on your thinking. The next two pages discuss common negative thinking patterns also known as cognitive distortions.

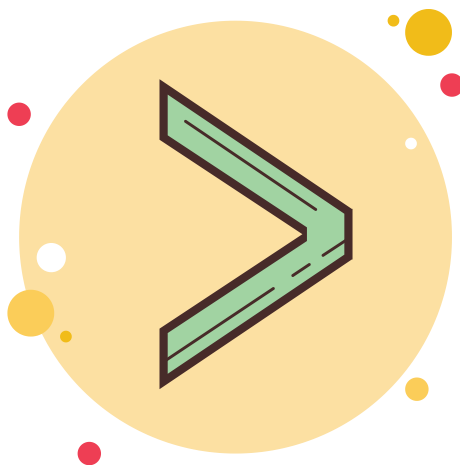
Cognitive Distortions

Cognitive distortions are ways that our mind convinces us of something that isn't really true. These inaccurate thoughts can reinforce negative thinking or emotions. Here are some common cognitive distortions.



Filtering

A person engaging in filtering (or "mental filtering") takes the negative details and magnifies those details while filtering out all positive aspects of a situation. For instance, a person may pick out a single, unpleasant detail and dwell on it exclusively so that their vision of reality becomes darkened or distorted. When a cognitive filter is applied, the person sees only the negative and ignores anything positive. The opposite can exist too! This is when someone takes a negative situation and only sees the positives (i.e. ignoring negative aspects of a toxic relationship and magnifying the positives).



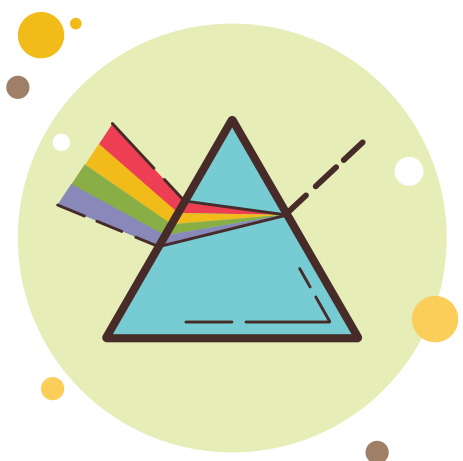
Jumping to conclusions

This cognitive distortion is sometimes called "mind reading". It occurs when we assume that we know what another person is feeling and thinking – and exactly why they act the way they do. Jumping to conclusions can also manifest itself as fortune-telling, where a person believes their entire future is pre-ordained (whether it be in school, work, or romantic relationships).



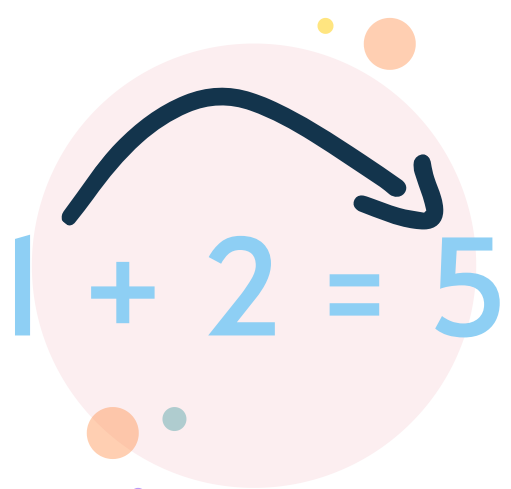
All or nothing Thinking

All or nothing thinking is sometimes called "black and white thinking". We have to be perfect or else we're a complete failure – there is no middle ground. A person with all-or-nothing thinking places people or situations in "either/or" categories, with no shades of gray or allowing for the complexity of most people and most situations. This type of thinking only allows for extremes.



Overgeneralization

In this cognitive distortion, a person comes to a general conclusion based on a single incident or a single piece of evidence. If something bad happens just once, they expect it to happen over and over again. A person may see a single, unpleasant event as part of a never-ending pattern of defeat.



Catastrophizing

This is also referred to as magnifying. In this distortion, a person hears about a problem and uses what if questions (e.g., "What if tragedy strikes?" "What if it happens to me?") to imagine the absolute worst occurring. The opposite of catastrophizing can also occur. This is called minimizing and it happens when a person does not think of realistic consequences and downplays the situation that they are in.

More cognitive distortions on the next page!

Cognitive Distortions

Cont.

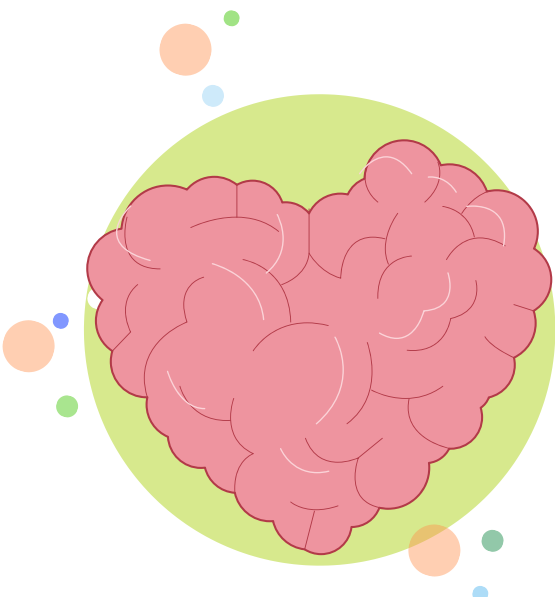
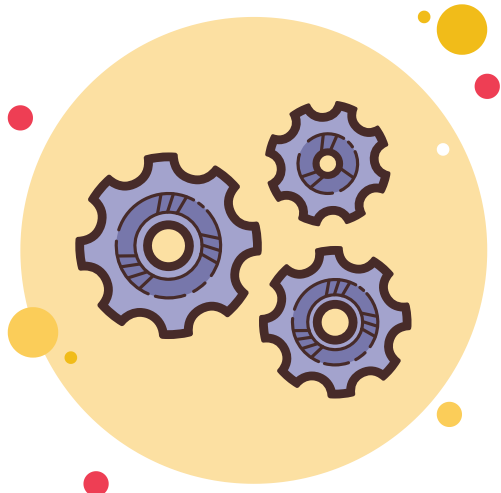


Personalization

This happens when you believe that everything others do or say is some kind of direct, personal reaction to you. Someone engaging in this thinking pattern will take everything personally, even when something is not meant in that way. A person who experiences this kind of thinking will also compare themselves to others, trying to determine who is smarter, better looking, etc.

Control Fallacies

This distortion involves two different but related beliefs about being in complete control of every situation in a person's life. 1) if we feel externally controlled, we see ourselves as helpless a victim of fate and do not take responsibility for things that may be within our control. 2) With the fallacy of internal control, we believe we are in control and responsible for others' feelings (both happiness and pain). For example, "Why aren't you happy? Is it because of something I did?"



Emotional Reasoning

Emotional reasoning can be summed up by the statement, "If I feel that way, it must be true." Whatever a person is feeling is believed to be true automatically and unconditionally. If a person feels stupid and boring, then they believe that they must be stupid and boring.

Fallacy of Fairness

In the fallacy of fairness, a person feels resentful because they think that they know what is fair, but other people won't agree with them. As our parents tell us when we're growing up and something doesn't go our way, "Life isn't always fair." People who go through life applying a measuring ruler against every situation judging its "fairness" will often feel resentful, angry, and even hopeless because of it. Because life isn't fair — things will not always work out in a person's favor, even when they should.



Shoulds

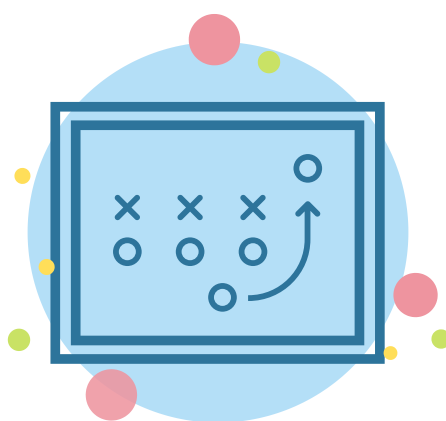
Should statements appear as inflexible rules about how everyone should behave. When rules that we've established for ourselves and others are broken we become angry, disappointed, or guilty. We may often believe they we are trying to motivate ourselves by using 'should' statements. Instead of saying "I should be getting As and Bs" try saying "My goal is to get As and Bs." The motivation remains, but setting goals recognizes the work you put in towards achieving the goal and does not impart guilt if your goal is not accomplished. After all, a goal is a work in progress.

Strategies to challenge these distortions on next page!

CHALLENGING NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

CONTINUED

Now that we know a little more about what negative thoughts are and what common cognitive distortions look like. Let's look at strategies to combat them.



STRATEGIES TO CHALLENGE NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

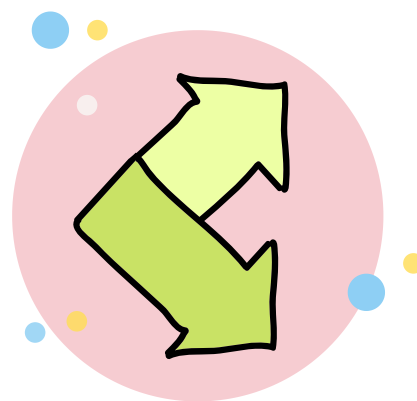


Reality Testing

- Looking at things realistically - try making a list:
- 1) What is my evidence for & against my thinking?
 - 2) Are my thoughts factual, or are they just my interpretations?
 - 3) Am I jumping to negative conclusions?
 - 4) How can I find out if my thoughts are actually true?

Looking for alternative explanations

- Challenge all or nothing thinking by asking yourself:
- 1) Are there any other ways that I could look at this situation?
 - 2) What else could this mean?
 - 3) If I were being positive, how would I perceive this situation?



Using Goal Directed Thinking

- Focus on areas that are within your control:
- 1) Is thinking this way helping me to feel good or to achieve my goals?
 - 2) What can I do that will help me solve the problem?
 - 3) Is there something I can learn from this situation, to help me do it better next time?

Putting it in Perspective

- Try looking at the bigger picture and ask yourself:
- 1) Is this situation as bad as I am making out to be?
 - 2) What is the worst thing that could happen?
 - 3) How likely is it?
 - 4) What is the best thing that could happen?
 - 5) What is most likely to happen?
 - 6) Is there anything good about this situation?
 - 7) Will this matter in five years time?





PODCASTS

THE HAPPINESS LAB

"In "The Happiness Lab" podcast, Yale professor Dr Laurie Santos will take you through the latest scientific research and share some surprising and inspiring stories that will forever alter the way you think about happiness. She's changed the lives of thousands of people through her class "Psychology and the Good Life," and she'll change yours, too." - Now updated to include bonus episodes to help you navigate pandemic related topics (loneliness, coach yourself through crisis, healthy relationships, and more).

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"Unseeable forces control human behavior and shape our ideas, beliefs, and assumptions. Invisibilia—Latin for invisible things—fuses narrative storytelling with science that will make you see your own life differently."

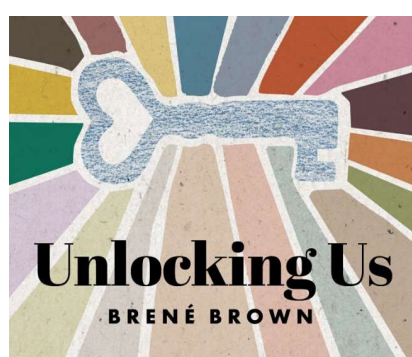
<https://www.npr.org/programs/invisibilia/>



UNLOCKING US

"Join researcher and #1 New York Times best-selling author Brené Brown as she unpacks and explores the ideas, stories, experiences, books, films, and music that reflect the universal experiences of being human, from the bravest moments to the most brokenhearted."

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HIDDEN BRAIN (FROM NPR)

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<https://www.npr.org/series/423302056/hidden-brain>

