

COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

Understanding Unhelpful Thinking Patterns



We all experience **automatic thoughts**, those swift, effortless ideas that often slip by us without notice. When we take them at face value, they can trigger powerful emotions like fear, anger, or shame, and prompt intense reactions. While these thoughts can feel real, they're frequently distorted by what psychologists call cognitive distortions, or unhelpful thinking patterns.

Below are 12 of the most common:



All-or-nothing thinking

Seeing things in black and white, either perfect or terrible. You might swing between pushing yourself to extremes then giving up completely.



Mental Filter

Focusing on a single negative detail and ignoring the bigger, more balanced picture.



Catastrophising

Imagining the worst-case scenario. You might ask, "What if...?" and assume disaster is just around the corner.



Overgeneralisation

Drawing sweeping conclusions from a single event, expecting the same outcome every time.



Disqualifying the positive

Dismissing or downplaying your strengths and achievements. Compliments might feel uncomfortable, so you reject them without a second thought.



Self blame

Taking responsibility for things outside your control, or blaming who you are when problems arise.



Emotional reasoning

Believing something is true simply because you feel it strongly. You trust your gut over the facts.



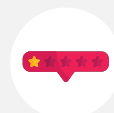
"Should" statements

Using rigid, duty-laden language ("must," "should," "ought to") that creates unrealistic expectations and pressure.



Jumping to conclusions

Making quick judgments without all the facts, like assuming what someone else is thinking or feeling.



Social comparison

Measuring yourself against others, focusing on your shortcomings rather than your strengths.



Labelling

Slapping one-word, often negative labels on yourself or others (e.g., "lazy," "failure"). These fixed labels ignore the full story.



Thought action fusion

Believing that thinking something is equivalent to doing it, or that your thoughts can influence real world events ("magical thinking").