

## COMMON THINKING MISTAKES

(ALSO CALLED AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS OR COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS)

Although some negative automatic thoughts are true, many are either untrue or have just a grain of truth. Here are a few common errors.

**1. All-or-nothing thinking (also called black-and-white, polarized, or dichotomous thinking):** You view a situation in only two categories instead of on a continuum.

*Example:* "If I'm not a total success, I'm a failure."

**2. Catastrophizing (also called fortune telling):** You predict the future negatively without considering other, more likely outcomes.

*Example:* "I'll be so upset I won't be able to function at all."

**3. Disqualifying or discounting the positive:** You unreasonably tell yourself that positive experiences, deeds, or qualities do not count.

*Example:* "I did that project well, but that doesn't mean I'm competent; I just got lucky."

**4. Emotional reasoning:** You think something must be true because you "feel" (actually believe) it so strongly, ignoring or discounting evidence to the contrary.

*Example:* "I know I do a lot of things well at work, but I still feel as if I'm a failure."

**5. Labeling:** You put a fixed, global label on yourself or others without considering that the evidence might more reasonably lead to a less disastrous conclusion.

*Examples:* "I'm a loser. He's no good."

**6. Magnification/minimization:** When you evaluate yourself, another person, or a situation, you unreasonably magnify the negative and/or minimize the positive.

*Examples:* "Getting a mediocre evaluation proves how inadequate I am. Getting high marks doesn't mean I'm smart."

**7. Mental filter (also called selective abstraction):** You pay undue attention to one negative detail instead of seeing the whole picture.

*Example:* "Because I got one low rating on my evaluation [which also contained several high ratings] it means I'm doing a lousy job."

**8. Mind reading:** You believe you know what others' motivations are, or what they are thinking, failing to consider other, more likely possibilities.

*Example:* "He's thinking that I don't know the first thing about this project."

**9. Overgeneralization (also called global thinking):** You make a sweeping negative conclusion that goes far beyond the current situation.

*Example:* "[Because I felt uncomfortable at the meeting] I don't have what it takes to make friends."

**10. Personalization:** You believe others are behaving negatively because of you, without considering more plausible explanations for their behavior.

*Example:* "The repairman was curt to me because I did something wrong."

**11. "Should" and "must" statements (also called imperatives):** You have a precise, fixed idea of how you or others should behave and you overestimate how bad it is that these expectations are not met.

*Example:* "It's terrible that I made a mistake. That mistake was disastrous. I should never make a mistake."

**12. Tunnel vision:** You only see the negative aspects of a situation.

*Example:* "My son's teacher can't do anything right. He's critical and insensitive and lousy at teaching."