

Stinkin' Thinkin'

What we think has a lot to do with the way our day will go. Often the thoughts we are having keep us stuck rather than moving forward in a healthy way. Here is a list of ways our thinking can be distorted and destructive and a list of ways we can untwist our thinking to help us make progress:

CHECKLIST OF COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

1.	All or nothing thinking: You look at things in absolute, black and white categories.
2.	Overgeneralization: You view a negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat.
3.	Mental Filter: You dwell on the negatives and ignore the positives.
4.	Discounting the positives: You insist that your accomplishments or positive qualities "don't count."
5.	Jumping to conclusions: (A) Mind reading – you assume that people are reacting negatively to you when there's no definite evidence for this; (B) Fortune Telling – you arbitrarily predict things will turn out badly.
6.	Magnification or Minimization: You blow things way out of proportion or you shrink their importance inappropriately.
7.	Emotional Reasoning: You reason from how you feel: "I feel like an idiot, so I really must be one." Or "I don't feel like doing this, so I'll put it off."
8.	"Should Statements": You criticize yourself or other people with "Shoulds" or "Shouldn'ts." "Musts," "Oughts," "Have tos" are similar offenders.
9.	Labeling: You identify with your shortcomings. Instead of saying, "I made a mistake," you tell yourself, "I'm a jerk," or "a fool," or "a loser."
10.	Personalization and Blame: You blame yourself for something you weren't entirely responsible for, or you blame other people and overlook ways that your own attitudes and behavior might contribute to a problem.

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TEN WAYS TO UNTWIST YOUR THINKING

1.	Identify the Distortion	Write down your negative thoughts so you can see which of the ten cognitive distortions you're involved in. This will make it easier to think about the problem in a more positive and realistic way.
2.	Examine the Evidence	Instead of assuming that your negative thought is true, examine the actual evidence for it. For example, if you feel that you never do anything right, you could list several things you have done successfully.
3.	The Double-Standard Method	Instead of putting yourself down in a harsh, condemning way, talk to yourself in the same compassionate way you would talk to a friend with a similar problem.
4.	The Experimental Technique	Do an experiment to test the validity of your negative thought. For example, if, during the episode of panic, you become terrified that you're about to die of a heart attack, you could jog or run up and down several flights of stairs. This will prove that your heart is healthy and strong.
5.	Thinking in Shades of Grey	Although this method might sound drab, the effects can be illuminating. Instead of thinking about your problems in all-or-nothing extremes, evaluate things on a range of 0 to 100. When things don't work out as well as you hoped, think about the experience as a partial success rather than a complete failure. See what you can learn from the situation.
6.	The Survey Method	Ask people questions to find out if your thoughts and attitudes are realistic. For example, if you believe that public speaking anxiety is abnormal and shameful, ask several friends if they ever felt nervous before they gave a talk.
7.	Define Terms	When you label yourself "inferior" or "a fool" or "a loser," ask, "What is the definition of a 'fool'?" You will feel better when you see that there is no such thing as a "fool" or a "loser."
8.	The Semantic Method	Simply substitute language that is less colorful and emotionally loaded. This method is helpful for "should statements." Instead of telling yourself "I shouldn't have made that mistake," you can say, "It would be better if I hadn't made that mistake."
9.	Re-attribution	Instead of automatically assuming that you are "bad" and blaming yourself entirely for a problem, think about the many factors that may have contributed to it. Focus on solving the problem instead of using up all your energy blaming yourself and feeling guilty.
10.	Cost-Benefit Analysis	List the advantages and disadvantages of a feeling (like getting angry when your plane is late), a negative thought (like "No matter how hard I try, I always screw up"), or a behavior pattern (like overeating and lying around in bed when you're depressed). You can also use the Cost-Benefit Analysis to modify a self-defeating belief such as, "I must always try to be perfect."

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