**COGNITIVE DISORTIONS AND THINKING TRAPS**

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| **What Are Cognitive Distortions?**  We have hundreds of thousands of thoughts every day. Most of these thoughts are neutral and harmless. We also have thoughts and beliefs that are positive and negative. Cognitive distortions are the thoughts and beliefs that are exaggerated, inaccurate, and self-defeating. These thinking traps are ways that our brain convinces us of something that's not true. These negative thoughts reinforce negative self-talk or emotions. Identifying, learning how to dispute, and modifying these styles of thinking can drastically improve how we feel, relate to others, and function in all areas of life. Learning to attack these patterns of negative thoughts and irrational feelings is called *cognitive restructuring*, and is the basis for ***Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT****).* |

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| **Types of** **Cognitive Distortions and Thinking Traps:**  **Polarized "Black and White" Thinking** – also called “all or nothing” thinking. There are no shades of gray or middle ground to be seen. For example, a person loses their job and thinks, “I am a total failure.”  **"Always" & "Never" Statements** - declarations containing the words "always" or "never". They are commonly used but rarely true. For example, “Things are always hard for me. I can never catch a break.”  **Should's (Shouldn'ts, Musts, Oughts)** - our list of ironclad rules about the way everyone should behave. Those who break our rules make us angry and if we violate our own rule, we feel guilt. Often people try to motivate themselves with a list of "shoulds," as though they have to be punished before they can do anything.  **Catastrophizing** - the habit of automatically assuming a "worst case scenario" and inappropriately characterizing minor or moderate problems or issues as disastrous events.  **Filtering** - taking negative details and magnifying them while filtering out all of the positive aspects of a situation. Doing so distorts reality to appear darker than it is.  **Mind Reading** -the tendency to assume that we “know” (rather than assuming we are guessing) what another person is thinking or feeling  **Fortune Telling** –assuming we know what will happen in the future, usually predicting a negative outcome.  **Ranking and Comparing** - the practice of drawing unnecessary and inappropriate comparisons between individuals or groups for the purpose of raising one's own self-esteem or lowering someone else's sense of self-worth relative to a peer group.  **Personalization** - a distortion in which a person believes that everything other people do is a direct personal reaction to us. We're constantly comparing ourselves to others to determine who is "better." People who engage in personalization may see themselves as the cause of an unhealthy but completely unrelated personal event.  **Overestimating:** This happens when we believe that something that is unlikely to occur is actually about to happen. For example: “I will faint” “I am going to get sick”  **Overgeneralization** - a gigantic conclusion is reached based upon a single incident or piece of evidence. If something bad has happened one time, we expect that it will ALWAYS be bad. One unpleasant event is seen as a never-ending pattern of defeat.  **Global Labeling** - the process of generalizing one or two traits into a negative global judgment, in an extreme form of generalization. Instead of an error being attributed to a specific situation, a person will attach an unhealthy label to themselves.  **Confirmation Bias** - the tendency to pay more attention to things which reinforce your beliefs than to things which contradict them.  **Sense of Entitlement** - an unrealistic, unmerited or inappropriate expectation of favorable living conditions and favorable treatment at the hands of others.  **Emotional Reasoning** - we believe that what we feel is true. If we FEEL stupid and ugly, it's because we ARE stupid and ugly.  **Fallacy of Change** - we expect others will change to suit us if we simply pressure and nag them enough. We feel we must change people because any hope of happiness relies entirely upon others.  **Control Fallacies** - feeling externally controlled allows us to play the helpless victim of fate. We assume responsibility for the pain and happiness of others around us, assuming that if someone else is, for example, unhappy, it's due to something we did.  **Avoidance Fallacy** – Belief that withdrawing from relationships with other people will work as a defensive measure to reduce the risk of rejection, accountability, criticism or exposure.  **Heaven's Reward Fallacy** - we expect that our sacrifice and self-denial will pay off as though someone, somewhere is keeping score. When the reward doesn't come, we get bitter.  **Blaming** - the practice of identifying a person or people responsible for creating a problem, rather than identifying ways of dealing with the problem. Can include self-blaming as well.  **Jumping to Conclusions** - without anyone saying so, we know what another person is thinking and why they're acting a certain way - especially when it comes to the way people are feeling about us.  **Always Being Right** – feeling as if we are always on trial to prove that our own opinions and behaviors are correct. We cannot fathom being wrong and will go to any length to be right - and demonstrate it.  **Magical Thinking** - expectation of certain outcomes based upon performance of unrelated events.  **Projection** - Projection is the act of attributing one's own feelings or traits onto another person and imagining or believing that the other person has those same feelings or traits.  **Chaos Manufacture** - the practice of unnecessarily creating or maintaining an environment of risk, destruction, confusion or mess.  **Tunnel Vision** - the habit or tendency to only see or focus on a single priority while neglecting or ignoring other important priorities. |

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| **Taking the First Steps to Start Changing Your Brain and Changing Your Mood**  Read through the list of Thinking Traps above and identify your TOP FIVE (the types of thinking traps or cognitive distortions you may fall into the most often). Try to think of a specific situation or situations in which you have noticed yourself using this type of thinking trap. Enter your TOP FIVE into the table below:   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | TYPE | SPECIFIC SITUATION | EMOTION I FELT IN THE SITUATION | | 1. |  |  | | 2. |  |  | | 3. |  |  | | 4. |  |  | | 5. |  |  |   Now that you have identified your TOP FIVE. Pick one to track for the next 5 days. |