

Cognitive Distortions

HELPFUL SHIFT ACTIVITY

COGNITIVE DISTORTION

HELPFUL SHIFT

Polarized Thinking: When you have an “all or nothing” thinking pattern.

Avoid thinking in extremes. Identify how you can be less extreme, more balanced, or more flexible in the situation.

Mental Filtering: When a person filters out positives, magnifies negative details, and dwells (Negative mental filtering). -OR- Acknowledges the positive experiences but refuses to accept it (Disqualifying the Positive).

Focus on and value positives that occur in a situation. Reflect on the entire situation and identify both positives and negatives. Embrace compliments and positive feedback.

Overgeneralization: Focusing on one event and incorrectly assuming that similar situations will always turn out the same way.

Use the single event as information, not proof. Remind yourself that one outcome does not predict every future outcome and identify what could be different next time.

Jumping to Conclusions: Knowing what another person is thinking (Mind Reading). -OR- Making conclusions and predictions based on little to no evidence (Fortune Telling).

Ask yourself if you are sure you ACTUALLY know what another person is thinking. Investigate your assumptions and identify logical, evidence-based reasons that contribute to a situation.

Catastrophizing: Expecting the worst-case scenario or minimizing positive experiences.

Take the experience for what it is and reframe the situation by looking for realistic possibilities, not only the worst-case scenario. When something positive happens, allow yourself to acknowledge it and take pride in your accomplishment.

Personalization: Taking things personally can cause a direct and personal reaction to what others do or say.

Identify why you feel responsible and determine whether the situation was actually within your control. Brainstorm other logical explanations before blaming yourself.

Blaming: Holding others responsible for your pain while overlooking your own role in the situation.

Notice when you are placing all responsibility on someone else. Try to see the situation from the other person's perspective, identify what was within your control, and take responsibility for any role you may have played.

Labeling: Assigning judgment to yourself or others based on one negative incident.

Remember that one mistake does not define a person. Focus on the event or behavior instead of labeling yourself or others.

Always Being Right: Having a strong need to be right by treating opinions as facts and trying to prove that others are wrong.

Remember that it is acceptable to be wrong sometimes. Ask yourself whether your thought is a fact, an opinion, or an assumption.

Should Statements: "Should," "must," or "shouldn't" statements are rigid rules placed on yourself or others.

Identify how the statement makes you feel. These thoughts may motivate you, but they can also create guilt, conflict, or paralysis. Try using "prefer" or "could" instead.

Emotional Reasoning: Assuming that a feeling must be true because it feels real, even when there is little evidence.

Allow yourself to feel your emotions without treating them as facts. Be mindful of your emotions without judgment, and look for evidence before deciding what is true.

Control Fallacy: Believing that life is completely controlled by outside forces, or believing that you are responsible for controlling everything around you.

Look for small changes you can make before focusing on bigger changes. Recognize what is within your control, what is outside your control, and where you may have influence.

Fallacy of Change: Believing that others must change before you can feel better or be happy.

Recognize that no one else is responsible for your happiness. Your happiness is influenced by your own decisions, actions, boundaries, and expectations.

Fallacy of Fairness: Believing that life should always be fair and that unfair situations should not happen.

State your feelings as preferences rather than expectations. Notice what is within your control, what is outside your control, and what you can appreciate in the situation.

Heaven's Reward Fallacy: Believing that hard work, sacrifice, or suffering should always be rewarded fairly.

Recognize that not every sacrifice will be rewarded in the way you expect. Notice when you are turning a hope into an expectation, and separate the value of your effort from the reward you receive.

Purpose

Cognitive distortions are unhelpful thinking patterns that can make emotions feel stronger or harder to manage. This activity helps you notice the thought, identify the distortion, and practice a more balanced response.

Step 1: Notice the thought (Think of a recent situation that caused stress, sadness, anger, guilt, or anxiety.)

Situation: What happened?

Automatic thought: What went through your mind?

Emotion & intensity: What did you feel on a scale of 1-10?

Step 2: Identify the cognitive distortion (Review the list of common cognitive distortions and choose the one that best fits your thought.)

Distortion I noticed:

Step 3: Practice a Helpful Shift (Use the “Helpful Shift” section to challenge the thought and create a more balanced perspective.)

Evidence that does not support this thought:

A more balanced thought can be:

Step 4: Re-rate the Emotion (After practicing a helpful shift, rate the emotion again. .)

Emotion intensity now (1-10)

Reflection:

- Which cognitive distortion shows up most often for me?
 - What emotion usually comes with this thought?
 - What helped me shift the thought?
 - What is one helpful shift I can practice this week?
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This week, I will practice noticing:

One helpful shift I will try is:

