

Common Distortions in Thinking

(and, as a result, feeling and relating)

1. **All or nothing thinking:** *Good or bad, black or white, either-or, now or never, “If I’m not perfect, I’m a failure” -all or nothing.* Dividing reality into one of only 2 categories.
2. **Overgeneralizing:** *“Never” and “always”.* A particular negative is made into an unbroken pattern of defeat or attack.
3. **Mental Filter:** *Focus on negative, overlook positive.* Obsessing on particular negative details and missing the big picture.
4. **Disqualifying the positive:** *“Yes, but...”* Rejecting positives as if they “don’t count” for some reason or another.
5. **Jumping to conclusions:** *Mind reading or the fortune telling error.* Assuming someone is reacting negatively to you without checking it out. Or predicting future things will turn out badly and believing as though it were already an established fact.
6. **Catastrophizing (also minimizing):** *“The worst thing that could happen” (or “It doesn’t matter.”).* Magnifying (or minimizing) the importance of things, such as a mistake exaggerated into a disaster or a positive quality shrunk to worthlessness.
7. **Emotional Reasoning:** *“I believe it because I feel it.”* Confirming the reality of something by our feelings (a downward cycle).
8. **Shoulding on ourselves (or others):** *Should, shouldn’t, must, ought.* Trying to motivate with legalisms. Consequences are neurotic guilt, anger, frustration and resentment.
9. **Assassinations of self (mislabeling):** *“I am a loser.” “She/he is a louse.”* Instead of describing your error, attaching a negative label to yourself (or others). Language is highly colored emotionally.
10. **Personalization:** *“I blame myself.”* Seeing yourself as the cause of some negative external event that in fact you were not primarily responsible for.

Categories adapted from David Burne (1980, p. 40-41). *Feeling good: The new mood therapy.* New York; William Morrow and Company.

As well as the cognitive-behavioral therapies of Aaron Beck and Donald Meichenbaum.



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