

QUESTIONS TO CHALLENGE COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

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The key components of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) are to 1) identify your cognitive distortions, 2) challenge the distorted thoughts, and 3) replace cognitive distortions with more accurate thoughts, beliefs, and self-talk. CBT is based on the understanding that your thoughts affect your feelings and behavior and your behaviors also affect your feelings and thoughts. So, when you change your thoughts, you will interrupt the cycle and the result will be feeling differently and acting differently.

Cognitive distortions are also called negative automatic thoughts because they happen automatically with little awareness that they are inaccurate and skewed toward the negative. Once you are aware of your cognitive distortions, you can begin to challenge them to find out if they are really accurate or whether you've focused on the negative, overgeneralized, or blamed yourself.

I recommend writing down your thoughts, identifying cognitive distortions, and using questions such as these to challenge and change your distorted thoughts.

- How do I know if this thought is accurate?
- What evidence do I have to support this thought or belief?
- How can I test my assumptions/beliefs to find out if they're accurate?
- Do I have a trusted friend whom I can check out these thoughts with?
- Is this thought helpful?
- Are there other ways that I can think about this situation or myself?
- Am I blaming myself unnecessarily?
- What or who else contributed to this situation?
- Is it really in my control?
- Am I overgeneralizing?
- Am I making assumptions?
- What would I say to a friend in this situation?
- Can I look for "shades of gray"?
- Am I assuming the worst?
- Am I holding myself to an unreasonable or double standard?
- Are there exceptions to these absolutes (always, never)?
- Am I making this personal when it isn't?