

# COMMON COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

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Cognitive distortions are also known as thinking errors, thinking distortions, irrational thoughts, distorted thoughts, and negative automatic thoughts.

**Thinking distortions are:**

- **automatic and happen without you realizing it**
- **negative**
- **exaggerated**
- **convincing**
- **not accurate reflections of reality**
- **something everyone does, but are much more prevalent in people suffering from anxiety, depression, and other mental health problems.**
- **all serve to validate your pessimistic outlook (things are hopeless, you're worthless or less than)**

You can find many similar lists of cognitive distortions, based on the work of Aaron Beck, Albert Ellis, and David Burns. It doesn't particularly matter how they are categorized or which type of distortion you are using. Categorizing them into different types of distortions only serves to help you identify a thinking distortion more easily. So, don't get hung up on figuring out which type of distortion it is; it's only important that you recognize it is a cognitive distortion.

# COMMON COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

- **Overgeneralizing** - You see a constant, negative pattern based on one event. I messed up on the job interview; I'll never get a job.
- **Blaming/Denying** - You blame others for your problems or mistakes OR you blame yourself when it wasn't entirely your fault. I drink because of my ex-husband.
- **Shoulds** - You have a rigid code of conduct dictating how you and others should behave. You criticize yourself harshly when you fail to follow these rules. I never should have dated him.
- **All or nothing thinking** - You see things as absolutes, no grey areas. Watch for words such as always, never, nobody, all, everybody, none. I'm always late.
- **Negativity bias** - You notice all of the negatives, but fail to notice the positives. Everything in my life sucks. I'm out of work. My car payment's late. My pants are too tight. My cat peed on the carpet.
- **Catastrophizing** - You expect the worst. I was late on the rent. I'm going to be evicted.
- **Labeling** - You label yourself negatively. I made a mistake, therefore, I'm a failure.
- **Magical thinking** - You think everything will be better when \_\_\_\_ (you're thinner, smarter, richer, get a new job, etc). I'll meet a new guy as soon as I lose 20 lbs.
- **Over-personalizing** - You make things personal when they aren't. You believe other people's opinions are facts. You think what other people do/say is in reaction to you. My wife complains about the high car payment. I take this as a criticism that I paid too much.
- **Mind reading** - You make assumptions about what others are thinking. I didn't get the job because I'm too old.
- **Double standard** - You hold yourself to a higher standard than everyone else. I'm happy when my boyfriend gets a B, but I expect myself to get straight A's.
- **Fallacy of fairness** - You think things should work out according to what you think is fair. If my boss valued me, he'd give me a raise.
- **Emotional reasoning** - You think your feelings are reality. I feel guilty for saying "no", so I must have been wrong to set that boundary.