



Unhelpful Thinking Styles

When a person experiences an unpleasant emotion (e.g., sadness, anxiety), that emotion is usually preceded by one or more unhelpful thoughts. These thoughts can be irrational in nature and influence your emotions. Everyone experiences unhelpful thoughts to some degree, but when a person is doing this automatically and consistently, these thoughts can lead to emotional distress. Below are some examples of unhelpful thinking styles – as you read through them, you may begin to notice some unhelpful thoughts that you tend to have.

Magnification & Minimization

Exaggerating or minimizing the importance of events. You might believe your achievements are unimportant or that your mistakes are excessively important. Or, you magnify the positive attributes of other people and minimize your own positive attributes.

Catastrophizing

Seeing only the worst possible outcome of a situation. Labeling a situation as huge, overwhelming, “the worst ever.” Viewing a situation as horrible, even though in reality the problem is quite small.

Overgeneralization

Making broad interpretations from a single event (e.g., “I felt awkward during my job interview... I am always so awkward”). Seeing a single event as a never-ending pattern of defeat.

Personalization

Holding oneself personally responsible for an event that is not entirely under one’s control (e.g., “My mom is so upset; she would be fine if I did more to help her.”)

Jumping to Conclusions

Interpreting the meaning of a situation without sufficient evidence.

Mindreading

Interpreting the thoughts and beliefs of others without hearing directly from those individuals (e.g., “She would not go on a date with me. She probably thinks I’m ugly.”)

Fortune Telling

(Predicting the Future)

Expecting a certain outcome (i.e., a situation will turn out badly) without appropriate evidence.

Disqualifying the Positive (“Mental Filter”)

Recognizing only the negative aspects of a situation or feedback, while ignoring the positive. You might receive many compliments on an evaluation but focus on the single piece of negative feedback.

Emotional Reasoning

Basing your view of situations or yourself on the way you are feeling. For example, the only evidence that something bad is going to happen is that you feel like something bad is going to happen.

“Should” Statements

Sometimes, by saying “I should” or “I shouldn’t” you can put unreasonable demands or pressure on yourself. These statements are not always helpful (e.g., “I should not be feeling anxious”) and create unrealistic expectations.

Black & White/All-or-Nothing Thinking

Thinking in absolutes, seeing only one extreme or the other. You are either good or bad, wrong or right, etc. or you use words like “always,” “never,” or “every.” There are no in-betweens or shades of grey.

Labeling

Describing yourself and/or others by making global statements based on limited evidence. You might use this label even if there are many examples that aren’t consistent with it (e.g., “I’m stupid”).



University of
New Hampshire

Psychological and Counseling Services (PACS)

3 Garrison Avenue, Smith Hall - 3rd Floor, Durham, NH 03824

Tel: 603-862-2090 Website: www.unh.edu/pacs