

Unhelpful Thinking Styles

When we are upset, our thinking can change in unhelpful ways. Our thinking can become *distorted* or *unbalanced*. Once we can identify the unhelpful thinking style, we can start to notice them – they often occur just before and during distressing situations. By recognising our unhelpful styles, we can begin to change them.

Mental Filter

When we notice only what the filter allows or wants us to notice and we dismiss anything that doesn't 'fit'. Like looking through dark blinkers or 'gloomy specs' or only catching the negative stuff, while anything more positive or realistic is dismissed. Only paying attention to certain types of evidence.

Say to yourself: "Am I only noticing the bad stuff? Am I filtering out the positives? Am I wearing 'gloomy specs'? What would be more realistic?"

Jumping to conclusions: Mind reading / Fortune telling

Believing we know what is going to happen in the future.

Say to yourself: "Am I thinking that I can predict the future? How likely is it that that might really happen?" or "Am I assuming I know what others are thinking? What's the evidence? Those are my own thoughts, not theirs. Is there another, more balanced way of looking at it?"

Personalisation / Critical self

Putting ourselves down self-criticism, blaming ourselves for events or situations that are not (totally) our responsibility. Or, blaming other people for something that was your fault!

Say to yourself: "There I go, that internal bully is at it again. Would most people who really know me say that about me? Is this something that I am totally responsible for?"

Polarisation: Black and white thinking / All or nothing thinking

Believing that something or someone can only be good or bad, right or wrong, rather than anything in-between or 'shades of grey'.

Say to yourself: "Things aren't either totally white or totally black – there are shades of grey. Where is this on the spectrum?"

Magnification and minimisation: Catastrophising / Mountains and molehills

Blowing things out of proportion (catastrophising) and believing that the worst possible thing will happen; Or, inappropriately shrinking something to make it seem less important, minimising the odds of how things are most likely to turn out, or minimising positives – or exaggerating the risks of danger, or the negatives.

Say to yourself: "OK, thinking that the worst possible thing will definitely happen isn't really helpful right now. What's most likely to happen?"
or "Am I exaggerating the bad stuff? How would someone else see it? What's the bigger picture?"

Judgements / Labelling

Making evaluations or judgements about events, ourselves, others, or the world, rather than describing what we actually see and have evidence for. Assigning labels to ourselves and other people. e.g. *I'm a loser; I'm completely useless; They're such an idiot.*

Say to yourself: "I'm making an evaluation about the situation or person. It's how I make sense of the world, but that doesn't mean my judgements are always right or helpful. Is there another perspective?"

Emotional reasoning

Assuming that because we feel a certain way, what we think must be true. I feel bad, so it must be bad I feel anxious, so I must be in danger.

Say to yourself: "Just because it feels bad doesn't necessarily mean it is bad. My feelings are just a reaction to my thoughts, and thoughts are just automatic brain reflexes.

Compare and despair

Seeing only the good and positive aspects in others, and getting upset when comparing ourselves negatively against them.

Say to yourself: "Am I doing that compare and despair thing? What would be a more balanced and helpful way of looking at it?"

Memories

Current situations and events can trigger upsetting memories, leading us to believe that the danger is here and now, rather than in the past, causing us distress, right now.

Say to yourself: "This is just a reminder of the past. That was then and this is now. Even though this memory makes me feel upset, it is not **actually** happening again right now.

Shoulds and Musts

Using critical words like 'should', 'must', 'ought' can make us feel guilty or like we have already failed. If we apply 'shoulds' to other people, the result is often frustration. Thinking or saying, 'I must' or 'I should' puts pressure on ourselves and sets up unrealistic expectations.

Say to yourself: "Am I putting more pressure on myself, setting up expectations on myself that are almost impossible? What would be more realistic?"

