

Challenge Your Thinking Traps

Thinking traps refer to patterns of thought that can limit our ability to achieve our goals. For example, if we are upset, we may overestimate the possibility that things will turn out badly, jump immediately to worst-case scenarios, or treat every

anxious thought as a fact. Although thinking traps, also known as thought distortions, aren't based on reality, they are not always easy to give up. The first step is to recognize our unhelpful thinking patterns so we can begin to challenge and change them.

Thought Distortion or Thinking Trap	How it may show up	What it sounds like
All-or-nothing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seeing things in black or white Lacking flexibility and the ability to see that exceptions exist 	<p>"If everything is not perfect, I'm a total failure."</p> <p>"This person upset me so they must be bad."</p>
Overgeneralizing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assuming the worst Negative self-talk Thinking one mistake means all attempts will result in failure 	<p>"If I didn't pass the test the first time, I'll never pass it."</p> <p>"I'm a terrible speaker and always mess up."</p> <p>"A friend once lied to me, which means you can never trust anyone."</p>
Filtering out the positives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coming up with reasons to ignore positive results Focusing only on the negative aspects of the situation while ignoring the positive 	<p>"I did well on the presentation, but that must have been luck."</p> <p>"I received one area of negative feedback on my review, so I must be not doing anything right."</p>
Jumping to conclusions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Making negative interpretations without actual evidence When you think the future is set in stone and the outcome is sure 	<p>Mind reading: "I can tell she secretly doesn't like me."</p> <p>Fortune telling: "I just know something terrible is going to happen."</p>
Catastrophizing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expecting the worst-case scenario to happen 	<p>"I'll mess up and everyone will think poorly of me."</p>
Emotional reasoning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Believing the way you feel reflects reality Drawing conclusions based solely on how you feel 	<p>"I feel it, so it must be true."</p> <p>"I'm nervous about this presentation. That must mean I'm going to bomb it."</p>
Labeling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Criticizing yourself based on mistakes and perceived shortcomings Using a negative word to describe yourself 	<p>"I'm a failure. I'm an idiot."</p> <p>"I don't deserve to be happy."</p>
Personalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assuming responsibility for things that are outside your control 	<p>"My friend canceled our plans. They must not want to spend time with me."</p> <p>"My partner seems distant today. I must have done something wrong."</p>
Unreal ideals or "Shoulds"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Holding yourself to an unrealistic or perfectionistic standard 	<p>"I should never make any mistakes at work. If I do I'm incompetent."</p>



If you're having trouble escaping the trap of negative thinking, contact your Employee Assistance Program. We have the guidance, tools and resources to help you embrace a more positive outlook.

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