

Common Cognitive Distortions with Simple Definitions

1. just-world hypothesis (belief that good things happen to good people, bad things happen to bad people, hard work will be rewarded, bad deeds will be punished, things happen for reasons; self, others, and the world should be controllable, orderly, predictable, fair, and just)
2. dichotomous thinking (believing things are absolutely all-or-nothing, black-or-white, right-or-wrong, good-or-bad, either-or)
3. fortune telling (catastrophizing; imagining the worst possible outcomes and the worst case scenario)
4. negativity bias (discounting the positive and highlighting the negative; mentally filtering out the positive)
5. magnification (seeing the negative results of actions or situations as larger or more meaningful than they really are)
6. minimization (seeing the results of actions or situations as smaller than they really are; can include "dismissive positivity," an unrealistic, unempathetic, invalidating, "unhelpful cheerful attitude.")
7. unfair comparisons (using unrealistic standards; comparing one unrelated thing to another in order to make something look more or less valuable than it really is; examples: "Why can't you be more like _____?" and "Other people have it worse than I do.")
8. emotional reasoning (believing that if you feel it, it must be true, even when there's no supporting evidence)
9. labeling (using a single behavior, trait, or characteristic to describe and judge a whole person)
10. overgeneralization (applying one experience to all experiences; from one example, drawing conclusions about all instances; believing if one person does something, all "those" people do it; believing if another person has even one trait like you do, you are soulmates, one and the same)
11. selective abstraction (forming conclusions based on an isolated detail of an event and ignoring the context or other relevant details)
12. jumping to conclusions (judging or deciding without all the facts)
13. mind reading (assuming you know what other people are thinking and can narrate their stories for them)
14. personalization (believing situations, conditions, or others' actions are solely in response to you)
15. external locus of control (believing others' needs and wants determine your actions vs. internal locus of control where your values and priorities determine your choice of actions)
16. "should" statements and rules (includes "musts" and "have tos" that are applied to situations, regardless of the circumstances; the opposite of "I should" is "I choose.")
17. wishful thinking/magical thinking/daydreaming/fantasizing (when not used for creative purposes, believing fervently that wishing it so can make it so)
18. opposition or defensiveness (to offer a sense of control and power rather than to gain understanding, insight, or connection)
19. avoidance and distraction (to avoid and evade acknowledgement of painful realities)
20. self-blame or other-blame even when facts show responsibility for what happened is complex