

MENTAL WELLBEING SERIES

Challenging Cognitive Distortions





COGNITIVE DISTORTION ONE

Polarized Thinking

EXAMPLE THOUGHT:

I received an A- on an exam when I am typically used to receiving A+ grades only, I feel like a failure.

REFRAMED THOUGHT:

I didn't do as well on the exam as I had hoped. But an A- is still a very good grade and I am grateful for it.

THE CHALLENGE:

- Avoid thinking in extremes.
- Don't choose either/or extremes.
- Identify how to be less extreme and more flexible.
- Think in shades of gray.
- Find the middle ground.



COGNITIVE DISTORTION TWO

Mental Filtering

1 Negative Mental Filtering

EXAMPLE THOUGHT:

I received my employee performance review, but I can't stop thinking about one negative comment my manager wrote.

REFRAMED THOUGHT:

I was lacking in one area of my review, but I performed well in other aspects of my job, and my manager did praise me.

THE CHALLENGE:

- Don't dwell on a single negative.
- Focus on all the positives that occurred during the situation.
- Reflect on the entire situation.
- Identify both positive and negative aspects.

2 Disqualifying the Positive

EXAMPLE THOUGHT:

I received a good mark on my assignment, but it's probably a mistake. I'm pretty sure it was just luck or a fluke, I don't normally get good grades.

REFRAMED THOUGHT:

I received a good mark on my assignment. I am grateful to receive this grade.

THE CHALLENGE:

- Value positive aspects as much as negative ones.
- Take pride in accomplishments.
- Embrace compliments or positive feedback.
- Cultivate an attitude of gratitude.



COGNITIVE DISTORTION THREE

Overgeneralization

EXAMPLE THOUGHT:

I failed this exam. I feel like such a failure. I don't think I am smart enough to take this class, I will probably just fail it.

REFRAMED THOUGHT:

I didn't pass this one exam, but in the past, I have always found a way to come back from a failed exam. I will work harder and try again next time.

THE CHALLENGE:

- Believe you can create different outcomes in the future.
- Reflect when a single negative had a long-lasting impact.
- Identify evidence that suggests it will impact future events.



COGNITIVE DISTORTION FOUR

Jumping to Conclusions

1 Mind Reading

EXAMPLE THOUGHT:

I visit a friend, but her expression towards me seems negative. She doesn't want to see me. She claims she is sick, but I feel like she is avoiding me.

REFRAMED THOUGHT:

She could really be sick and wants rest. Other reasons why she wouldn't want to see me: self-conscious about her appearance or worried she is contagious.

THE CHALLENGE:

- Ask yourself if you are sure you actually know what someone is thinking.
- Investigate your assumptions.
- Identify logical reasons that contributed to the situation.

2 Fortune Telling

EXAMPLE THOUGHT:

I am going to have a bad day today.

REFRAMED THOUGHT:

Today may have some challenges, but I will overcome them and have a good day.

THE CHALLENGE:

- Ask yourself: how do you know what will happen?
- Is there evidence to suggest it?
- How often have you been accurate in the past?



COGNITIVE DISTORTION FIVE

Catastrophizing

1 Magnification

EXAMPLE THOUGHT:

There is a lot of traffic on my way to work. I'm never going to get there on time.

REFRAMED THOUGHT:

I may be late, but I will get there safely. In the meantime, I can enjoy the radio.

THE CHALLENGE:

- Take the negative event for what it is.
- Don't make any more of it than it is.
- Look for opportunities rather than the catastrophic event.

2 Minimization

EXAMPLE THOUGHT:

As an athlete, I win an award, but it doesn't seem like I accomplished much, as others have already won this award.

REFRAMED THOUGHT:

I won an award, and I am proud of what I accomplished and grateful for how far I have come in my athletic career.

THE CHALLENGE:

- Take positives for what they are.
- Try not to diminish the importance of positive qualities and turn it into a negative.
- Embrace positive experiences and take pride in accomplishments.



COGNITIVE DISTORTION SIX

Personalization

EXAMPLE THOUGHT:

My partner and I show up late to a dinner party. Everyone seemed mad and was not having a good time because we showed up late. I should have left earlier.

REFRAMED THOUGHT:

Even though we were late, I cannot control how people feel. There could be other factors that contributed to people not enjoying the party before we arrived.

THE CHALLENGE:

- Identify why you feel responsible.
- Determine if you were in control.
- Acknowledge it is rarely one person's fault.
- Brainstorm logical reasons rather than blaming yourself.



COGNITIVE DISTORTION SEVEN

Blaming

EXAMPLE THOUGHT:

I blame my significant other for the relationship issues we experienced. Why am I always treated this way? If only they would put more effort into our relationship.

REFRAMED THOUGHT:

A relationship takes two people to make it work. I am equally responsible for the issues we may have. I should apologize for my mistakes and move forward.

THE CHALLENGE:

- Avoid playing the victim role.
- View from others' perspectives.
- Recognize that blame does not always fall on one person.
- Take responsibility for your role.
- Identify solutions and move on.



COGNITIVE DISTORTION EIGHT

Labelling

EXAMPLE THOUGHT:

Someone at work has made a mistake that has severe consequences for other tasks. Why are people so stupid? Now I have to re-do everything.

REFRAMED THOUGHT:

I understand mistakes can happen. I will spend extra effort to fix it, but it's not the end of the world. I know they are capable of doing a better job next time.

THE CHALLENGE:

- Remember labels are the result of an error or mistake.
- Attribute the error to the event instead of yourself or others.
- One failure does not define you. Separate this from labels.



COGNITIVE DISTORTION NINE

Always Being Right

EXAMPLE THOUGHT:

I didn't agree with the way a task was being performed. I told them how to do it, I don't know why they won't listen to me. It should be done my way.

REFRAMED THOUGHT:

I don't really know which method is better until I try it for myself. Maybe we can go with their method this time and see how it works out.

THE CHALLENGE:

- It is acceptable to be wrong.
- Mistakes are allowed to happen.
- Be open-minded to others' suggestions.
- Try and identify if your thoughts are facts or opinions.



COGNITIVE DISTORTION TEN

Should Statements

EXAMPLE THOUGHT:

I should stop being lazy and exercise today.

REFRAMED THOUGHT:

I would prefer to exercise today, but I'm not feeling up to it. Taking time to rest is as important as exercising. I should allow myself to rest, and I can exercise tomorrow.

THE CHALLENGE:

- Identify how it makes you feel.
- These statements need to be motivating rather than conflicting.
- Use the word "prefer" in place of "should."



COGNITIVE DISTORTION ELEVEN

Emotional Reasoning

EXAMPLE THOUGHT:

I feel alone and uncared for because my partner does not want to spend time with me and is instead working overtime.

REFRAMED THOUGHT:

My partner is working overtime because they are busy at work, not because they do not care for me. When they are not busy, they will spend time with me.

THE CHALLENGE:

- Let yourself feel emotions.
- Be mindful without judgement.
- Avoid letting emotions become truths.
- Challenge the validity of feelings and identify if they are based on facts.



COGNITIVE DISTORTION TWELVE

Control Fallacies

1 External Control Fallacy

EXAMPLE THOUGHT:

I feel overwhelmed and anxious due to the Coronavirus pandemic. I feel like I have no control over protecting myself or my family from the virus.

REFRAMED THOUGHT:

I recognize I cannot control how the virus spreads, but I can reduce the risks by protecting myself, such as wearing a face mask and washing my hands regularly.

THE CHALLENGE

- Look for opportunities in small changes before big ones.
- Recognize you cannot control everything.
- Identify things in your control and things out of your control.

2 Internal Control Fallacy

EXAMPLE THOUGHT:

My daughter failed her exam. I blame myself because I think I should have spent more time helping her study.

REFRAMED THOUGHT:

Maybe she failed her exam because it was really difficult, not because I am a bad parent. I can offer to help, but it is her decision to put in more effort.

THE CHALLENGE

- Recognize you can't control everything around you.
- Think whether your actions actually contributed to it.
- Is there someone else that needs to take responsibility?



COGNITIVE DISTORTION THIRTEEN

Fallacy of Change

EXAMPLE THOUGHT:

I feel my partner is perfect in every other way except these few minor things. If I make them change those things, it will make me so happy.

REFRAMED THOUGHT:

I can suggest those changes, but I understand that it isn't necessary to make me happy. If they choose not to change, I'll still be happy with the way they are.

THE CHALLENGE

- Recognize no one is responsible for your own happiness.
- Separate the change from your own happiness.
- Your happiness depends on yourself and the actions you take.



COGNITIVE DISTORTION FOURTEEN

Fallacy of Fairness

EXAMPLE THOUGHT:

A friend of mine makes a lot more money at their job doing something similar to me. Why don't I make the same amount? It's not fair they get paid more.

REFRAMED THOUGHT:

I might not make as much money, but I am grateful for the job I have. There could be many reasons why I don't make as much.

THE CHALLENGE

- State feelings as a preference rather than an expectation.
- Identify what you don't have control over.
- Consider other factors and be grateful for what you do have.



COGNITIVE DISTORTION FIFTEEN

Heaven's Reward Fallacy

EXAMPLE THOUGHT:

A colleague was promoted over me, but I believe I worked harder and deserved that promotion.

REFRAMED THOUGHT:

It would have been nice to get a promotion, but I can't control others' decisions. I can let my boss know of my hard work, and maybe I will be considered next time.

THE CHALLENGE

- Recognize not every sacrifice you make will be rewarded.
- State feelings as a preference rather than an expectation.
- Separate it from the sacrifice.
- Consider other factors.