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Thinking Errors (Unhealthy Ways of Thinking)

Thinking Errors are unhealthy ways of thinking that can influence our emotions. Although everyone experiences thinking errors, in their more extreme forms they can be harmful.

Magnification & Minimization: Exaggerating the importance of shortcomings and problems while minimizing the importance of desirable qualities. This thinking error involves magnifying your negative qualities while minimizing your positive ones.

Catastrophizing: You jump to the worst possible outcome in every scenario. This thinking error often comes with “what if” questions.

Magical Thinking: The beliefs that acts will influence unrelated situations. For example, “I am a kind person, people shouldn’t be mean to me.”

Overgeneralization: With overgeneralization, words like “always”, “never”, “everything”, and “nothing” are frequent in your train of thought. You make broad interpretations from single or few events. For example, you’re running late for work and you think “nothing ever goes my way.”

Personalization: This thinking error leads you to believe that one is responsible for events that may be out of your control. This often leads to feelings of guilt. For example, you may see your child unhappy and immediately think you’re a bad parent.

Mind Reading: Interpreting the thoughts and beliefs of others without enough evidence. For example, your partner comes home looking sad. Instead of asking how they are, you immediately assume they’re unhappy in the relationship. Therefore, you become defensive. In reality, your partner received a bad review at work.

Fortune Telling: The preconceived notion that something will turn out badly without adequate evidence.

All-or-Nothing Thinking: Seeing things in extreme terms. “If I do poorly on this exam, I’m a total idiot.”

Should Statements: The belief that things should be a certain way without exceptions. “I should be better.”

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Disqualifying the Positive: Being aware of only the negative aspects of a situation and discounting the positive. For example, if someone compliments your outfit, you may think they're just being nice.

Emotional Reasoning: Assuming our feelings convey useful information. For example, "my nervousness about flying means there is a good chance my plane will crash."

Reflection

Which cognitive distortions do you resonate with the most?

How can you challenge these cognitive distortions?

Book: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Made Simple By: Seth J. Gillihan PhD

Worksheet by: Janay Bailey, LMHC