Irrational thinking patterns pdf book free printable version

I'm not robot!

Medically reviewed by Karin Gepp, PsyD — Written by Sandra Silva Casabianca — Updated on January 10, 2022DefinitionList and examples5 tips to stop cognitive distortionsRecapControl fallacies, overgeneralization, and global labeling are a few in the list of common cognitive distortions that may lead to negative thinking.You've experienced cognitive distortions. We all have. Ever thought you did awful at a job interview or school presentation but ended up passing with flying colors? That was your mind leading you astray.You may say, "Impossible! I know I did terribly. Lucky me, they didn't realize it." And that's your mind, once more, leading you in the not-so-merry dance of cognitive distortions.Identifying these distorted thoughts can help you reverse them.A distorted thought or cognitive distortion — and there are many — is an exaggerated pattern of thought that's not based on facts. It consequently leads you to view things more negatively than they really are.In other words, cognitive distortions are your mind convincing you to believe negative things about yourself and your world that are not necessarily true.Our thoughts have a great impact on how we feel and how we behave. When you treat these negative thoughts as facts, you may see yourself and act in a way based on faulty assumptions.Everyone falls into cognitive distortions on occasion. It's part of the human experience. This happens particularly when we're feeling down.But if you engage too frequently in negative thoughts, your mental health can take a hit.You can learn to identify cognitive distortions so that you'll know when your mind is playing tricks on you. Then you can reframe and redirect your thoughts so that they have less of a negative impact on your mood and behaviors.The most common cognitive distortions or distorted thoughts include:You may identify with some more than others or recognize you tend to use one in particular for specific situations. This is natural. Self-examination might be the first step toward reversing negative thinking and some of these thought patterns. Here's a closer look at the list of cognitive distortions:FilteringMental filtering is draining and straining all positives in a situation and, instead, dwelling on its negatives. Even if there are more positive aspects than negative in a situation or person, you focus on the negatives exclusively.Polarization or all-or-nothing thinkingPolarized thinking is thinking about yourself and the world in an "all-or-nothing" way. When you engage in thoughts of black or white, with no shades of gray, this type of cognitive distortion is leading you.All-or-nothing thinking usually leads to extremely unrealistic standards for yourself and others that could affect your relationships and motivation.Black-or-white thoughts may also set you up for failure.When you engage in polarized thinking, everything is in "either/or" categories. This might make you miss the complexity of most people and situations. OvergeneralizationWhen you overgeneralize something, you take an isolated negative event and turn it into a never-ending pattern of loss and defeat. With overgeneralization, words like "always," "never," "everything," and "nothing" are frequent in your train of thought.Overgeneralization can also manifest in your thoughts about the world and its events.Discounting the positiveDiscounting positives is similar to mental filtering. The main difference is that you dismiss it as something of no value when you do think of positive aspects.Jumping to conclusionsWhen you jump to conclusions, you interpret an event or situation negatively without evidence supporting such a conclusion. Then, you react to your assumption.Jumping to conclusions or "mind-reading" is often in response to a persistent thought or concern of yours.CatastrophizingCatastrophizing is related to jumping to conclusions. In this case, you jump to the worst possible conclusion in every scenario, no matter how improbable it is.This cognitive distortion often comes with "what if" questions. What if he didn't call because he got into an accident? What if she hasn't arrived because she really didn't want to spend time with me? What if I help this person and they end up betraying or abandoning me?Several questions might follow in response to one event. PersonalizationPersonalization leads you to believe that you're responsible for events that, in reality, are completely or partially out of your control.This cognitive distortion often results in you feeling guilty or assigning blame without contemplating all factors involved.With personalizing, you also take things personally. Control fallaciesThe word fallacy refers to an illusion, misconception, or error.Control fallacies can go two opposite ways: You either feel responsible or in control of everything in your and other people's lives, or you feel you have no control at all over anything in your life. In this example, you place all control of your behavior on someone else or an external circumstance. This is an external control fallacy.The other type of control fallacy is based on the belief that your actions and presence impact or control the lives of others.Fallacy of fairnessThis cognitive distortion refers to measuring every behavior and situation on a scale of fairness. Finding that other people don't assign the same value of fairness to the event makes you resentful.In other words, you believe you know what's fair and what isn't, and it upsets you when other people disagree with you.The fallacy of fairness will lead you to face conflict with certain people and situations because you feel the need for everything to be "fair" according to your own parameters. But fairness is rarely absolute and can often be self-serving. BlamingBlaming refers to making others responsible for how you feel."You made me feel bad" is what usually defines this cognitive distortion. However, even when others engage in hurtful behaviors, you're still in control of how you feel in most situations.The distortion comes from believing that others have the power to affect your life, even more so than yourself.ShouldsAs cognitive distortions, "should" statements are subjective ironclad rules you set for yourself and others without considering the specifics of a circumstance.You tell yourself that things should be a certain way with no exceptions.When it comes to yourself, you might believe you should always make your bed, or you should always make people laugh."You should be better," you constantly tell yourself.When these things don't happen — they really depend on many factors — you feel guilty, disappointed, let down, or frustrated.You may believe you're trying to motivate yourself with these statements, such as "I should go to the gym every day." However, when circumstances change, and you can't do what you should, you become angry and upset. You got out of work late and couldn't get to the gym, for example.Emotional reasoningEmotional reasoning leads you to believe that the way you feel is a reflection of reality. "I feel this way about this situation, hence it must be a fact," defines this cognitive distortion.This cognitive distortion might also lead you to believe future events depend on how you feel. You might also assess a random situation based on your emotional reaction. If someone says something that makes you angry, you immediately conclude that person is treating you poorly. Fallacy of changeThe fallacy of change has you expecting other people will change their ways to suit your expectations or needs, particularly when you pressure them enough.Global labelingLabeling or mislabeling refers to taking a single attribute and turning it into an absolute. This happens when you judge and then define yourself or others based on an isolated event. The labels assigned are usually negative and extreme.This is an extreme form of overgeneralization that leads you to judge an action without taking the context into account. This, in turn, leads you to see yourself and others in ways that might not be accurate.Assigning labels to others can impact how you interact with them. This, in turn, could add friction to your relationships. When you assign those labels to yourself, it can hurt your self-esteem and confidence, leading you to feel insecure and anxious. Always being rightThis desire turns into a cognitive distortion when it trumps everything else, including evidence and other people's feelings.In this cognitive distortion, you see your own opinions as facts of life. This is why you will go to great lengths to prove you're right.Most irrational patterns of thought can be reversed once you're aware of them. This applies to negative thinking, too.Still, cognitive distortions sometimes go hand in hand with mental health conditions, such as personality disorders. This makes it more challenging to reframe.Reaching out to a mental health professional can help if you feel the process is too overwhelming.Meanwhile, try to remember that it's not the events but your thoughts that upset you in many instances. You might not be able to change the events, but you can work on redirecting your distorted thoughts.Beginning with small changes can be helpful. Here are some tips:1. Thinking about your thoughtsIf an event is upsetting you, step away from it if you can and try to focus on what you're telling yourself about the event.2. Replacing absolutesOnce you focus on your thoughts and recognize a pattern, consider replacing statements such as "always" and "nothing" with "sometimes" and "this."3. Defining yourself and othersTry labeling the behavior. Instead of labeling yourself "lazy" because you didn't clean today, consider: "I just didn't clean today." One action doesn't have to define you.4. Searching for positive aspectsEven if it's challenging at first, what if you find at least three positive examples in each situation. It might not feel natural, but eventually, it may become a spontaneous habit.5. Does evidence back up your negative thought? Before concluding, consider asking, investigating, and questioning yourself and others to ensure you have as many facts as possible. If you can, make an extra effort to believe these facts.Cognitive distortions are negative filters that impact how you see yourself and others.When our thoughts are distorted, our emotions are, too. By becoming aware and redirecting these negative thoughts, you can significantly improve your mood and quality of life. Last medically reviewed on May 6, 2021Beck AT. (1976). Cognitive therapies and emotional disorders. New York: New American Library.Burns DD. 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