

What are Cognitive Distortions?

Cognitive distortions are like mind tricks that can mess with your thinking and feelings. They're like wearing funky glasses that make the world look different than it really is.

These sneaky mental habits can make you see things in exaggerated or unrealistic ways, leading to unnecessary stress and anxiety.

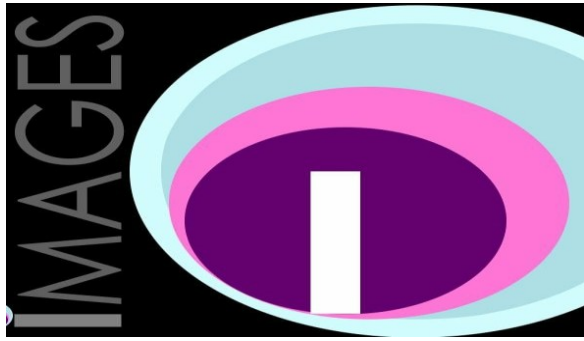
Picture it this way: your brain has a habit of playing tricks on you, making you believe things that aren't true or blowing things out of proportion. It's like looking through a distorted lens that changes the way you perceive reality.

These cognitive distortions can mess up your mood, decisions, and interactions with others.

But don't worry!

Once you're aware of these mental tricks, you can catch them in action and start seeing things in a more balanced and realistic way. It's like taking off those funky glasses and seeing the world for what it truly is.

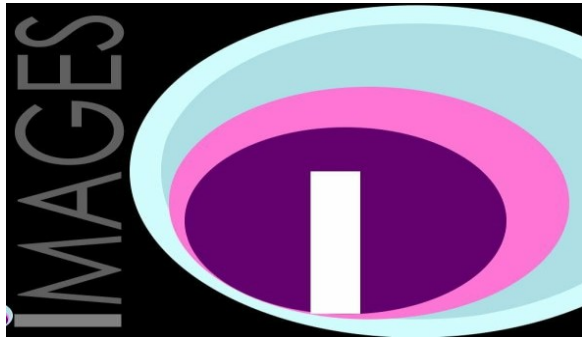
By recognizing these distortions, you can untangle your thoughts and emotions, leading to a clearer and more accurate view of the world around you.



10 Distorted Thinking Patterns (Cognitive Distortions)

Here are the 10 distorted thinking patterns according to Dr. Burns. Burns writes:

1. **All-Or-Nothing Thinking** – You see things in black-and-white categories. If your performance falls short of perfect, you see yourself as a total failure.
2. **Overgeneralization** – You take a single negative incident and extrapolate it into a broader pattern of defeat. A single setback becomes a belief that everything will always go wrong.
3. **Mental Filter** – You focus solely on a single negative event, ignoring all positive experiences. This negativity bias taints your perception of reality, much like a drop of ink that clouds an entire beaker of water.
4. **Disqualifying the positive** – You downplay or dismiss positive occurrences, not allowing yourself to see them as valuable. They “don’t count.” This allows negative beliefs to persist despite evidence to the contrary.
5. **Jumping to conclusions** – You make a negative interpretation even though there are no definite facts that convincingly support your conclusion.
 - A. **Mind reading.** You arbitrarily conclude that someone is reacting negatively to you, and you don’t bother to check this out.
 - B. **The fortune teller error.** You anticipate that things will turn out badly, and you feel convinced that your prediction is an already-established fact.
6. **Magnification (Catastrophizing) or Minimization**– You exaggerate the importance of things (such as your goof-up or someone else’s imperfections), or you inappropriately shrink things until they appear tiny (your own desirable qualities or the other person’s achievements). This is also called the “binocular trick.”

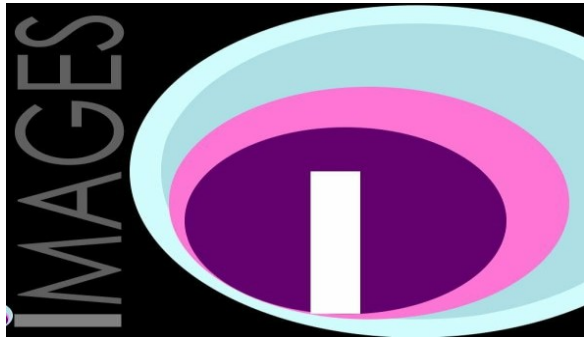


7. **Emotional Reasoning** – You assume that your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are: “I feel it, therefore it must be true.
8. **Should Statements** – You try to motivate yourself with shoulds and shouldn’ts, as if you had to be whipped and punished before you could be expected to do anything. “Musts” and “oughts” are also offenders. The emotional consequence is guilt. When you direct should statements toward others, you feel anger, frustration, and resentment.
9. **Labeling and Mislabeled** – This is an extreme form of overgeneralization. Instead of describing your error, you attach a negative label to yourself: “I’m a loser.” When someone else’s behavior rubs you the wrong way, you attach a negative label to him: “He’s a goddam louse.” Mislabeled involves describing an event with language that is highly colored and emotionally loaded.
10. **Personalization** – You see yourself as the cause of some negative external event which in fact you were not primarily responsible for.

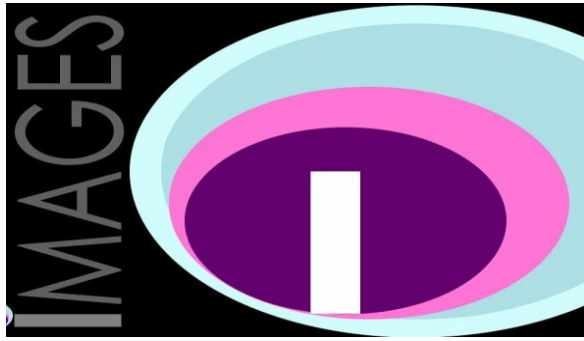
I think the key is to use this list to challenge your own thinking. In any scenario where your thinking starts to seem particularly negative, it’s good to sanity check against the 10 distorted thinking patterns.

How To Handle Cognitive Distortions

Here are some effective strategies to tackle those tricky cognitive distortions:



1. **Reality Check:** Think of it as hitting the pause button on your thoughts. When your mind starts running wild with extreme ideas, take a step back and ask yourself: “Hey, is this based on real facts or am I just riding an emotional rollercoaster?” Seek solid evidence to back up your thoughts, and you might be surprised at the clarity it brings.
2. **Mindful Awareness:** Imagine this as a mental dojo where you practice watching your thoughts without the judgmental referee. By observing your thoughts without jumping to conclusions, you can spot those sneaky distortions as they creep in. This lets you choose a wiser way to look at situations, like trading in old glasses for a clearer pair.
3. **Evidence Collection:** It’s like being a detective of your own mind. When distorted beliefs show up, collect proof that’s both for and against them. This detective work helps you build a more balanced case and challenge those pesky automatic negative thoughts.
4. **Alternative Explanations:** Picture your mind as a courtroom where different explanations present their cases. Instead of settling for the first negative interpretation, invite other possibilities to the stand. Sometimes the truth is more multi-faceted than it first seems.
5. **Double-Standard Technique:** Imagine you’re giving advice to a friend stuck in your shoes. We’re often kinder to others than we are to ourselves. This technique lets you apply the same empathy and understanding you’d offer to a friend, helping you see things with a kinder perspective.
6. **Positive Journaling:** Think of this as building a treasure chest of your wins. Keep a journal where you jot down the positive moments and achievements in your life. This can balance out the tendency to focus only on the negatives, like a counterweight for your thoughts.
7. **Reality Testing:** Visualize this as a direct line of communication. If you’re second-guessing someone else’s thoughts or intentions, skip the guessing game and ask them directly. It’s like tuning into the right channel instead of getting stuck in the “mind reading” distortion.
8. **Behavioral Experiments:** It’s like a science experiment for your thoughts. When negative beliefs start whispering in your ear, put them



to the test. Try out different behaviors and see if the feared outcome really shows up. Sometimes reality doesn't play out the way our distorted thoughts predicted.

9. **Label Replacement:** Imagine your inner vocabulary getting a makeover. Swap those overly negative labels you give yourself with kinder and more accurate ones. This tweak can dial down the impact of labeling distortions, like trading a storm for a gentle breeze.
10. **Counseling and Therapy:** Think of this as a power-up for your journey. If cognitive distortions are giving you a tough time, consider teaming up with professionals who specialize in cognitive-behavioral techniques. They're like guides who help you navigate the maze of your mind and develop strategies to overcome those distortions.

Remember, these practices take time and practice to master. But by consistently applying them, you can gradually shift your thinking patterns and develop a more realistic and balanced perspective on life's challenges.

Key Takeaways

Here are my key takeaways:

- **Know the patterns.** Familiarize yourself with the ten distorted thinking patterns.
- **Recognize distorted thought patterns.** Once you know the patterns, you can start to recognize thought patterns that may not be serving you well.
- **Challenge your own thinking.** See if the patterns resonate especially in situations where your thinking or feeling is not particularly effective. For example, you might find that you have a habit of jumping to negative conclusions, without actual facts, or you might find that you let negative emotions get in the way of interpreting your situation.

