
Information from Your Patient Aligned Care Team

Fixing Cognitive Distortions

Cognitive distortions have a way of playing havoc with our lives. If we let them. This kind of “stinkin’ thinkin’” can be “undone,” but it takes effort and lots of practice — every day. If you want to stop the irrational thinking, you can start by trying out the exercises below.

- **Identify Our Cognitive Distortion:** We need to create a list of our troublesome thoughts and examine them later for matches with a list of cognitive distortions. An examination of our cognitive distortions allows us to see which distortions we prefer. Additionally, this process will allow us to think about our problem or predicament in more natural and realistic ways.
- **Examine the Evidence:** A thorough examination of an experience allows us to identify the basis for our distorted thoughts. If we are quite self-critical, then, we should identify a number of experiences and situations where we had success.
- **Double Standard Method:** An alternative to “self-talk” that is harsh and demeaning is to talk to ourselves in the same compassionate and caring way that we would talk with a friend in a similar situation.
- **Thinking in Shades of Gray:** Instead of thinking about our problem or predicament in an either-or polarity, evaluate things on a scale of 0-100. When a plan or goal is not fully realized, think about and evaluate the experience as a partial success, again, on a scale of 0-100.
- **Survey Method:** We need to seek the opinions of others regarding whether our thoughts and attitudes are realistic. If we believe that our anxiety about an upcoming event is unwarranted, check with a few trusted friends or relatives.
- **Definitions:** What does it mean to define ourselves as “inferior,” “a loser,” “a fool,” or “abnormal.” An examination of these and other global labels

Cognitive Distortions (continued)

likely will reveal that they more closely represent specific behaviors, or an identifiable behavior pattern instead of the total person.

- **Re-attribution:** Often, we automatically blame ourselves for the problems and predicaments we experience. Identify external factors and other individuals that contributed to the problem. Regardless of the degree of responsibility we assume, our energy is best utilized in the pursuit of resolutions to problems or identifying ways to cope with predicaments.
- **Cost-Benefit Analysis:** It is helpful to list the advantages and disadvantages of feelings, thoughts, or behaviors. A cost-benefit analysis will help us to ascertain what we are gaining from feeling bad, distorted thinking, and inappropriate behavior. Note: 1) clinical concept of secondary gain; and 2) refer to cost-benefit analysis.

Reference: Burns, D.D. (1989). *The feeling good handbook: Using the new mood therapy in everyday life*. New York: William Morrow.