

The 10 Major Cognitive Distortions

1. All or Nothing / Black or White Thinking: no middle ground, things are either perfect or a total failure, other people are either bad or good, behaving as though there were only two possibilities

Example: *You spend a lot of time and money on your child's birthday party. He loves the party and has a great time but he didn't like the birthday cake. Because he didn't like the cake you see the party (or even yourself) as a **complete** failure/disaster*

2. Overgeneralizing: seeing a negative event as something that will happen again and again or if one thing goes wrong, everything is going wrong, drawing conclusions based on one example

Example: *You don't get the job you interviewed for so you assume you'll **never** get the job you want or will fail **every** interview*

3. Mental Filter: screening out the positive aspects of a situation and seeing only the negative. Can include also discounting the positive qualities of ourselves

Example: *You **focus** on a negative comment someone made about you at a party **ignoring** all of the positive compliments you received*

4. Discounting the Positive: overlooking, implying or insisting that your positive qualities or accomplishments don't matter or mean nothing

Example: *You have an exam coming up and feel extremely anxious, telling yourself you are going to fail, discounting the fact that you are intelligent and have done well on tests for the class in the past*

5. Jumping to Conclusions: negatively interpreting things even if not supported by facts, predicting things will go a certain way.

Two other distortions typically related to Jumping to Conclusions

- **Mind Reading:** believing you know what someone else is thinking about you
- **Fortune Telling:** predicting things will turn out badly or unfavorably.

6. Magnifying or Minimizing: over-evaluating (“magnifying”) or under-evaluating (“minimizing”) the importance of a situation or information

Example: Magnifying: *you came from a broken home and you see it as shameful –*
Minimizing: *despite the fact that you had to work extra hard and you now have a good career and a loving family to show for it*

7. Emotional Reasoning: assuming that how you feel reflects how things are, assuming how you feel reflects who you are

Example: *You assume that because you feel anxious/fearful something bad is bound to happen*

8. Shoulds: believing things “should” or “shouldn't” be a certain way – whether it's ourselves, others or situations.

Examples: *“I shouldn't get anxious” , “He shouldn't act like that” , “I should be more successful”*

9. Labeling: A combination of both #1 and #2 above, we can label ourselves or others but typically implies a negative connotation based on mistakes or events that upset us.

Examples: *“I'm such a screw-up” , “She's such a bitch” , “All of the people that work there are idiots”*

10. Personalizing (Self-Blame): Seeing ourselves as the cause of an external negative event. Holding ourselves responsible for things not under our control. Often stems from childhood. Also beating ourselves up when we do make a mistake.

Example: *You see a coworker is having a bad day so you assume you must have done something wrong.*