



Syracuse Integrative Psychiatry

Comprehensive care. Transformative outcomes.

Week 6: Cognitive Distortions

Identifying Thinking Errors

What are Cognitive Distortions?

Cognitive distortions are irrational thought patterns that cause you to perceive reality inaccurately. These "thinking errors" often reinforce negative thinking or emotions. Everyone experiences them to some degree, but they become a problem when they are frequent and intense.

Common Distortions

1. All-or-Nothing Thinking

Viewing situations in only two categories instead of on a continuum.

"If I'm not a total success, I'm a failure."

2. Catastrophizing

Predicting the future negatively without considering other, more likely outcomes. "I'll be so upset, I won't be able to function at all."

3. Disqualifying the Positive

Unreasonably telling yourself that positive experiences, deeds, or qualities do not count. "I did that project well, but that doesn't mean I'm competent; I just got lucky."

4. Emotional Reasoning

Thinking something must be true because you "feel" it (actually believe it) so strongly, ignoring evidence to the contrary. "I feel like a failure, so I must be one."

5. Labeling

Putting a fixed, global label on yourself or others without considering that the evidence might more reasonably lead to a less disastrous conclusion. "I'm a loser." "He's no good."

6. Magnification/Minimization

When you evaluate yourself, another person, or a situation, you unreasonably magnify the negative and/or minimize the positive.

"Getting a mediocre evaluation proves how inadequate I am. Getting high marks doesn't mean I'm smart."

7. Mental Filter

Paying undue attention to one negative detail instead of seeing the whole picture. "Because I got one low rating on my evaluation [which also contained several high ratings], it means I'm doing a lousy job."

8. Mind Reading

Believing you know what others are thinking, failing to consider other, more likely possibilities. "He thinks I don't know the first thing about this project."

Homework

This week, pay attention to your automatic thoughts. When you notice a shift in your mood, ask yourself: "What is going through my mind right now?" Write down the thought and see if you can identify which distortion it falls under.

