

Thinking Traps

Although some automatic thoughts are true, many are either untrue or have just a grain of truth. Typical mistakes in thinking include:

1. **All-or-nothing thinking** (also called black-and-white, polarized, or dichotomous thinking): You view a situation in only two categories instead of on a continuum. *Example:* "If I'm not a total success, I'm a failure."
2. **Catastrophizing** (also called fortune-telling): You predict the future negatively without considering other, more likely outcomes. *Example:* "I'll be so upset, I won't be able to function at all."
3. **Disqualifying or discounting the positive:** You unreasonably tell yourself that positive experiences, deeds, or qualities do not count. *Example:* "I did that project well, but that doesn't mean I'm competent; I just got lucky."
4. **Emotional reasoning:** You think something must be true because you "feel" (actually believe) it so strongly, ignoring or discounting evidence to the contrary. *Example:* "I know I do a lot of things okay at work, but I still feel like I'm a failure."
5. **Labeling:** You put a fixed, global label on yourself or others without considering that the evidence might more reasonably lead to a less disastrous conclusion. *Example:* "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. *Example:* "Getting a mediocre evaluation proves how inadequate I am. Getting high marks doesn't mean I'm smart."
7. **Mental filter** (also called selective abstraction): You pay undue attention to one negative detail instead of seeing the whole picture. *Example:* "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:** You believe you know what others are thinking, failing to consider other, more likely possibilities. *Example:* "He thinks that I don't know the first thing about this project."
9. **Overgeneralization:** You make a sweeping negative conclusion that goes far beyond the current situation.

Example: "[Because I felt uncomfortable at the meeting] I don't have what it takes to make friends."

10. **Personalization:** You believe others are behaving negatively because of you, without considering more plausible explanations for their behavior. *Example:* "The repairman was curt to me because I did something wrong."
11. **"Should" and "must" statements** (also called imperatives): You have a precise, fixed idea of how you or others should behave, and you overestimate how bad it is that these expectations are not met.
Example: "It's terrible that I made a mistake. I should always do my best."
12. **Tunnel vision:** You only see the negative aspects of a situation. *Example:* "My son's teacher can't do anything right. He's critical and insensitive and lousy at teaching."