

Cognitive Distortions

Cognitive distortions are irrational thoughts that can influence our emotions. Everyone experiences cognitive distortions to some degree, but in their more extreme forms they can be maladaptive.

Magnification and Minimization: Exaggerating or minimizing the importance of events. One might believe their own achievements are unimportant, or that their mistakes are excessively important.

Catastrophizing: Seeing only the worst possible outcomes of a situation.

Overgeneralization: Making broad interpretations from a single or few events. “I felt awkward during my first job interview. I am always so awkward.”

Magical thinking: The belief that acts will influence unrelated situations. “I am a good person—Bad things shouldn’t happen to me.”

Personalization: The belief that one is responsible for events outside of their own control. “My mother is always upset. It must be because I have not done enough to help her.”

Jumping to conclusions: Interpreting the meaning of a situation with little or no evidence.

Mind reading: Interpreting the thoughts and beliefs of others without adequate evidence. “She would not go on a date with me. She must think I am ugly.”

Fortune telling: The expectation that a situation will turn out badly without adequate evidence.

Emotional reasoning: The assumption that emotions reflect the way things really are. “I feel like a bad friend, therefore I must be a bad friend.”

Disqualifying the positive: Recognizing only negative aspects of a situation while ignoring the positive. One might receive many compliments on an evaluation but focus on the single piece of negative feedback.

Should statements: The belief that things should be a certain way. “I should always be friendly.”

All-or-nothing thinking: Thinking in absolutes such as “always”, “never”, or “every”. “I never do a good job on my work.”