

Cognitive *distortions*

- These are exaggerated or irrational ways of thinking that keep symptoms going, for example anxiety or low mood.
- Everyone has them, to a different degree. On their own they are not a sign of a disorder.
- Problems start when we lack distance from, and a critical view of, our own beliefs.
- Once you can recognise and name them, it gets easier to step back from them.

All-or-nothing thinking

Also called black-and-white thinking. You see only two extremes, with nothing in between.

"If I don't do it perfectly, I've failed."

Overgeneralisation

You draw a conclusion about everything from a single event. Watch for words like "always", "never", "everyone".

"It didn't work again. Nothing ever works out for me."

Mental filter

You focus on one unpleasant detail and judge the whole situation by it.

"Everything went well, but I made one mistake, so it was a failure."

Discounting the positive

You treat good experiences and your own strengths as luck or as something that doesn't count.

"They only praised me to be polite."

Jumping to conclusions

Conclusions without evidence. Mind reading: you assume you know what others think. Fortune telling: you assume the worst will happen.

"She definitely thinks I'm boring."

Magnification and minimisation

What is unpleasant grows, and what is good shrinks.

"This one mistake cancels out all my effort."

Emotional reasoning

You assume something is true because you feel it is.

"I feel stupid, so I must have done something stupid."

"Should" and "must" statements

Rigid rules for yourself and others. Aimed at yourself, they bring guilt; aimed at others, anger and frustration.

"I must always cope on my own."

Labelling

Instead of describing a behaviour, you stick a rigid label on yourself or someone else.

"I'm a failure."

Personalisation

You blame yourself for events or other people's behaviour that you have no control over.

"My boss is in a bad mood, it must be because of me."