

DON'T BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU THINK



THINKING ABOUT THINKING

Have you ever caught yourself thinking about things in a way that makes you feel sad, frustrated, or less confident? Many of us slip into ways of thinking that make us feel unsure of our abilities. These types of thoughts are called **cognitive distortions**. They trick us into thinking and feeling that certain things are true, even if those thoughts and feelings aren't supported by facts. Below is a list of some of the most common distortions, how they might be affecting your life, and what you can do about them.

COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

ALL-OR-NOTHING THINKING

You see things in black-or-white categories, if something falls short of perfect, you see it as a total failure.

You get a C on your midterm, higher than the average, but you expected to get an A. You can still get an A- in the class, but you see your midterm grade as a sign you have failed the course.

CATASTROPHIZING

You exaggerate the importance of your problems or shortcomings, and/or minimize the value of your strengths.

As a senior, you want to be a leader for your team. However, you've been experiencing some pain during practices and feel you won't be able to lead anymore if you get injured. You fail to see that your ability to communicate with your team will make you a valuable leader no matter what.



OVER-GENERALIZATION

You see a single negative event, such as a match loss or an injury, as a never-ending pattern of defeat by using words such as "always" or "never" when you think about it.

You go on a date and have a good time, but they don't ask you on a second date. You then come to the conclusion that you will never find a partner or be in a relationship.

DISQUALIFYING THE POSITIVE

You reject positive experiences by insisting they "don't count." If you do a good job, you may tell yourself that it wasn't good enough or that anyone could have done as well.

You're lifting more during workouts. You ignore the strength & conditioning improvements because you still feel your game performance could be better.

FILTERING

You pick out a single negative detail and dwell on it exclusively, so that your vision of all reality becomes darkened.

You usually submit your assignments on time, but you turned this assignment in late. You focus on this one instance as a sign that you are unable to keep up with course work.

PERSONALIZATION

You hold yourself personally responsible for an event that isn't entirely under your control.

You missed an extra point after a touchdown on Saturday, and the team lost - you can't help but feel as though you would have won if you had just made that extra point, so you begin to blame yourself for the loss.

MAGICAL THINKING

You believe that your own thoughts, wishes, or desires can influence the external world.

You think things going wrong in your life will improve when you achieve some other goal. You will be happier when you lose weight or you will have more friends if you were smarter.



EMOTIONAL REASONING

You assume that your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are.

You have been injured, so you've missed a couple of practices. You start telling yourself "I feel like a bad teammate, therefore I must be a bad teammate."

FORTUNE TELLING

A type of jumping to conclusions; you predict that things will turn out badly, even if you have no real evidence for that prediction..

Before a game you tell yourself "we're going to lose," or after an injury you tell yourself, "it will never get better."

MIND READING

A type of jumping to conclusions; without checking it out, you arbitrarily conclude that someone is reacting negatively to you.

You walk into class late, and assume everyone is looking at you, thinking about and judging you for your tardiness.

"SHOULDs"

You tell yourself that things should be the way you hoped or expected them to be.

You tell yourself that you should be lifting more, you should be faster, or you should be able to manage your classes and practices better. In reality, you are getting good grades with the help of tutors, and your coaches are impressed by your determination during practices.



NOW WHAT?

Did some of those sound familiar? Take a moment to reflect on the times that you may have found yourself thinking in these ways. Did it change your feelings, emotions, or ability to perform academically or physically? If so, you are not alone. These cognitive distortions are common, but in their more extreme forms, they can be harmful to your well being. Luckily, there are a few steps you can take to help recognize them and reduce the harm they cause.

1 notice your feelings

How are the thoughts going through your head making you feel? What emotion am I having? What did I notice in my body?

2 are the thoughts helpful?

What are you responding to? What did those thoughts, images, or memories say about this situation?

3 search for evidence

What evidence do you have that **supports** the thought you're having?

What facts provide evidence **against** the unhelpful thoughts?

4 find alternatives

What would someone else say about this situation?

What advice would you give to someone else who was going through this? Is there another way to think about this?

5 distract

Change your situation or do something to stop the thought. We can choose to hold onto thoughts, or to let them go. By doing something different, it helps let go of the thought faster, giving it less chance to impact the way you feel and perform.