

Handout 2.3: Examples of Depression and Anxiety-Producing Cognitive Distortions

The following are some cognitive distortions that are at the root of anxiety based on the work of CBT pioneers Aaron Beck and David Burns:

1. **ALL-OR-NOTHING THINKING:** You see things in black-and-white categories. If you make a mistake, you might think that you “failed” or are a “failure.”
2. **OVERGENERALIZATION:** You generalize from a specific. You think in absolutes, like *always* and *never*, and see a single negative event as a never-ending pattern.
3. **MENTAL FILTER:** You pick out a single negative event and dwell on it, like a drop of ink that discolors a whole glass of water.
4. **MAGNIFICATION or MINIMIZATION:** You either blow things out of proportion or deny that something is a problem when it is. Examples: “*I am the worst mother ever*” or “*It’s nothing—no big deal*” (when it really is a big deal to you).
5. **“SHOULD” STATEMENTS:** You have preconceived ideas about how you and other people “should” be. Judgmental and unforgiving expectations create a lot of anxiety.
6. **PERSONALIZATION:** You are self-conscious and think things are about you when that is just your interpretation. When someone behaves negatively, you think that that behavior is a response to you, and then blame yourself.
7. **PLAYING THE COMPARISON GAME:** You compare yourself to others and feel the need to keep up with or outshine others to feel good about yourself. Example: “He is so much smarter than me; I’m stupid.”
8. **FORTUNE TELLING:** You think that you can predict the future, and you convince yourself that bad things will happen. Example: “I will always have these problems!”
9. **LABELING:** You label yourself or others by terms such as *lazy*, *fat*, *stupid*, *loser*, and *jerk*, stating them as if they were facts. A label becomes an erroneous evaluation of self-worth.

Now, write some examples of your own anxiety-producing thoughts in the left column. In the right-hand column, identify the types of distortions for each thought.

The Anxiety Solution

Irrational Thoughts	Cognitive Distortions
Example: I am a loser and always will be	Labeling, fortune telling, all-or-nothing thinking
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____