

10 Thinking Errors That Lead to Anxiety

All of us have the ability to create our own negative moods. We often feel that it's a negative event, something that happens outside of our control usually, that causes depression or anxiety. But it's what we tell ourselves about that event that is often the biggest contributor to feeling bad, or in making a bad situation even worse. The good news is that you can learn techniques to free yourself of these patterns and feel better – for good. Here are some examples of distorted thinking.

- **Catastrophizing**--taking an event you are concerned about and blowing it out of proportion to the point of becoming fearful. Example: believing that if you fail a quiz then the teacher will completely lose respect for you, that you will not graduate from college, that you will therefore never get a well-paying job, and will ultimately end up unhappy and dissatisfied with life.
- **Jumping to Conclusions:** making a judgment with no supporting information. Example: believing that someone does not like you without any actual information to support that belief.
- **Personalization:** when a person attributes an external event to himself when there is actually no causal relationship. Example: If a checkout clerk is rude to you and you believe that you must have done something to cause it, when you may not have done anything at all.
- **Filter:** when a person makes a judgment based on some information but disregards other information. Example: Someone attends a party and afterward focuses on the one awkward look directed her way and ignores the hours of smiles.
- **Overgeneralization:** making a broad rule based on a few limited occurrences. Example: believing that if one public speaking event went badly that all of them will.
- **Black and White Thinking:** categorizing things into one of two extremes. Example: Believing that people are either excellent in social situations or terrible, without recognizing the large gray area in-between.
- **Labeling:** attaching a label to yourself after a negative experience Example: Feeling awkward at a party leads to the conclusion: "I'm an awkward person."
- **Emotional Reasoning:** You assume that your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are: "I feel it, therefore it must be true."
- **Should Statements:** You try to motivate yourself with shoulds and shouldn'ts, as if you had to be whipped and punished before you could be expected to do anything. "Musts" and "oughts" are also offenders. The emotional consequence is guilt. When you direct should statements toward others, you feel anger, frustration, and resentment.
- **Disqualifying the positive:** You dismiss positive experiences by insisting they "don't count" for some reason or other. In this way you can maintain a negative belief that is contradicted by your everyday experiences.

So, what do you do?

1. **Know the patterns.** Familiarize yourself with these distorted thinking patterns. Look at them often. Memorize them.
2. **Recognize distorted thought patterns.** Once you know the patterns, you can start to recognize thought patterns that may not be serving you well. Whenever you are feeling depressed or anxious, examine how you got yourself there. Pick out your top 3 and review each day for their presence.
3. **Challenge your own thinking.** Learn to challenge those ways of thinking. Ask yourself if you could look at a situation differently. Is it POSSIBLE to see events any differently? Of course it is, so how might you? Use a sense of humor, "Uh oh, there I go again overpersonalizing." Most especially, cut yourself and others some slack, be more supportive, generous, forgiving, kind, loving, and patient with yourself.

Check out: "Feeling Good: the new mood therapy," and "When Panic Attacks" both by David Burns