

Transforming Negative Thoughts

Cognitive distortions are unhelpful (yet common) ways of thinking that can make us feel bad about ourselves and the world around us. Learning to identify and change these thought patterns helps us see things in a more positive light and ultimately feel better. Use this tool as a guide to challenging negative thoughts.

How to Identify Unhelpful Thought Patterns

Cognitive Distortions	What It Means	Example
All-or-Nothing Thinking	Seeing things in black and white	"If I'm not perfect, I'm a total failure."
Overgeneralization	Believing that if one bad thing happens, it will always happen	"I missed one deadline, so I'll miss every deadline."
Mental Filtering	Focusing on the negative parts of a situation and ignoring the positive	"I made a mistake during my presentation, so the whole thing was terrible."
Discounting the Positive	Thinking that the good things you do don't count	"I only did well because it was easy, not because I'm good."
Jumping to Conclusions	Making assumptions without enough evidence	"They didn't say hi, so they must be mad at me."
Catastrophizing	Expecting the worst possible outcome	"If I mess up this project, I'll lose my job."
Emotional Reasoning	Believing that if you feel a certain way, it must be true	"I feel like a failure, so I must be a failure."
Should Statements	Thinking that things should be a certain way	"I should be able to handle everything on my own."
Labeling	Putting harsh labels on yourself or others	"I'm stupid for making that mistake."
Personalization	Blaming yourself for things that aren't really your fault	"It's my fault the team didn't meet the deadline."

How to Reframe Negative Thoughts

Step 1: Catch the thought

- Pay attention when you're having a negative thought.
- Write it down.

Step 2: Challenge the thought

- Is this thought really true?
- What evidence do I have?
- Is there another way to look at this?

Step 3: Change the thought

- Think of a more realistic or positive thought.
- Instead of "I always mess up," try "Sometimes I make mistakes, but I can learn from them."