

Cognitive Distortions & Alternatives

THE THINKING TRAP, AND A MORE BALANCED WAY TO SEE IT

Cognitive distortions are common thinking patterns that make situations feel worse than they are. Each one has a more balanced alternative — not to dismiss the difficulty, but to see it more accurately.

THE THINKING TRAP

A MORE BALANCED THOUGHT

	All-or-Nothing Thinking Seeing things in extremes, with no middle ground.	→	"There's a middle ground. I don't have to be perfect to have done well."
	Overgeneralisation Drawing a broad, negative conclusion from one event.	→	"This happened once. It doesn't mean it will always happen."
	Mental Filter Focusing only on the negative details and ignoring the positives.	→	"One mistake doesn't erase the parts of today that went well."
	Disqualifying the Positive Dismissing positive experiences or achievements.	→	"This counts. I'm allowed to acknowledge what I did well."
	Jumping to Conclusions Assuming you know what others think or will happen.	→	"I don't actually know. There could be many reasons for this."
	Catastrophising Expecting the worst possible outcome, without considering alternatives.	→	"This might be difficult, but I can handle it. There are other outcomes too."
	Emotional Reasoning Believing that because you feel something, it must be true.	→	"Feelings are real, but they aren't always accurate signals of danger."
	Should Statements Using rigid rules about how things should be for yourself or others.	→	"It would be nice, but it's okay if things don't go exactly that way."
	Labelling Assigning a fixed, negative label to yourself or others.	→	"I made a mistake. That doesn't define who I am."
	Personalisation Blaming yourself for things that aren't your responsibility.	→	"This is a shared situation. It's not solely my fault."
	Magnification Making problems seem much bigger than they are, or minimising positives.	→	"This feels big right now, but it is one part of a bigger picture."
	Mind Reading Assuming you know what others are thinking, usually something negative.	→	"I can't read minds. I could ask, rather than assume."

GENTLE REMINDERS

- Thoughts are not facts
- It's a thinking trap, not the truth
- A more balanced thought is often more accurate
- Be kind and compassionate with yourself as you practise

Noticing the trap is the first step. Choosing the alternative is the practice.