Cognitive Distortions

Cognitive Distortion	Example	Triggers	Strategy
All-or-Nothing Thinking	If I'm not the best, I'm a total failure.	Perfectionist environments or high-stakes tasks.	Challenge perfectionism by finding the middle ground. Ask, 'Is there a spectrum between success and failure?'
Overgeneralization	I failed this test, so I'll fail every test.	Repeated failures, rejection, or a pattern of negative events.	Look for exceptions to the rule. Remind yourself, 'One event doesn't determine the future.'
Mental Filtering	I got five compliments, but one negative comment means I failed.	Receiving negative feedback or criticism.	Consciously list the positives and weigh them equally. Ask, 'Am I ignoring important positive feedback?'
Tunnel Vision	This project is a disaster because of one error.	Challenging long-term projects with setbacks.	Zoom out and consider the full picture. Ask, 'What else is true about this situation?'
Disqualifying the Positive	That success doesn't count; it was just luck.	Moments of success or receiving compliments.	Acknowledge your contributions. Ask, 'Would I say this to a friend about their success?'
Jumping to Conclusions	*Mind Reading*: They think I'm stupid. *Fortune Tellling*: This presentation will go horribly.	*Mind Reading*: Social settings or fear of judgment. *Fortune Tellling*: Before important events or deadlines.	*Mind Reading*: Check the evidence. Ask, 'Do I really know what they're thinking?' *Fortune Tellling*: Focus on the present. Say 'I can't predict the future. Let's see what happens.'
Catastrophizing	If I make one mistake, my career is over.	Making a mistake in high-pressure situations.	Think of less extreme outcomes. Ask, 'What's the worst that can realistically happen, and how would I cope?'
Emotional Reasoning	I feel anxious, so this must be dangerous.	Stressful or unfamiliar situations.	Separate emotions from facts. Remind yourself, 'Feelings are not facts.'
Should Statements	I should never make mistakes.	Imposing high standards on oneself.	Replace 'should' with 'I'd like to' or 'It would be helpful if.'
Labeling and Mislabeling	I made a mistake, so I'm a failure.	Personal failures or receiving criticism.	Describe the behavior, not yourself. Say, 'I made a mistake, but that doesn't define me.'

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Personalization	It's my fault the meeting went poorly.	Group work or interpersonal conflicts.	Consider other factors. Ask, 'What else could have contributed to this?'
Blaming	It's their fault I'm upset.	Disputes or moments of anger.	Take ownership of your emotions. Say, 'I can't control others, but I can control how I react.'
Magnification and Minimization	My mistake was huge, but my success doesn't matter.	Mistakes in high-pressure environments.	Reassess the importance of events. Ask, 'Am I exaggerating or shrinking things unfairly?'
Comparison Bias	Everyone else is more successful than me.	Comparing yourself to others, especially on social media.	Focus on your progress, not others'. Remind yourself, 'Comparison isn't fair because everyone's path is different.'
Control Fallacies	*Internal*: It's my fault they're upset. *External*: I can't do anything; it's all out of my hands.	*Internal*: Trying to control or manage group dynamics. *External*: Feeling powerless or out of control.	Recognize what's in your control and let go of what's not.
Fallacy of Fairness	It's not fair that I work harder but get less recognition.	Situations that seem unfair or inequitable.	Accept that fairness isn't guaranteed. Focus on what you can control instead.
Heaven's Reward Fallacy	If I work hard, I should automatically succeed.	When hard work doesn't yield expected results.	Detach effort from guaranteed outcomes. Ask, 'What other reasons make my efforts worthwhile?'
Being Right	I have to prove I'm right, no matter what.	Arguments or debates.	Prioritize connection over being right. Ask, 'Is it more important to be right or to understand?'
Fallacy of Change	They need to change so I can be happy.	Frustration with others' behavior.	Accept others as they are. Focus on what you can change about yourself instead.
Always Being on Alert	I need to anticipate every problem to stay safe.	Stressful or unpredictable environments.	Practice mindfulness and relaxation techniques. Ask, 'Am I scanning for danger unnecessarily?'