

11 Common Cognitive Errors

All or nothing thinking: Placing experiences in one of two opposite categories – for example, flawless or defective, immaculate or filthy, saint or sinner.

Overgeneralization: Drawing sweeping inferences (e.g., “I can’t control my temper”) from a single instance.

Discounting the positives: Deciding that if a good thing has happened, it couldn’t have been very important.

Jumping to conclusions: Focusing on one aspect of a situation in deciding how to understand it (e.g., “The reason I haven’t received a phone call from the job I applied for is that they have decided not to offer it to me”).

Mind reading: Believing one knows what another person is thinking, with very little evidence.

Fortunetelling: Believing one knows what the future holds, while ignoring other possibilities.

Magnifying/Minimizing: Evaluating the importance of a negative event, or the lack of importance of a positive event in a distorted manner.

Emotional reasoning: Believing that something must be true, because it feels like it is true.

Making “should” statements: Telling oneself one should do (or should have done) something, when it is more accurate to say that one would like to do (or wishes one had done) the preferred thing.

Labeling: Using a label (“bad mother,” “idiot”) to describe a behavior, and then imputing all the meanings the label carries.

Inappropriate blaming: Using hindsight to determine what one “should have done,” even if one could not have known the best thing to do at the time; ignoring mitigating factors; or ignoring the roles played by others in determining a negative outcome.

Thinking errors I most need to address: