



COMMON THINKING TRAPS

Here is a list of common 'Thinking Traps' or 'Cognitive Errors' that we all fall into (from Leahy, 1996). Once you have identified the 'Hot Thought(s)' that are causing your unpleasant emotion(s) using the Change Your Negative Thinking toolkit, it might be helpful to identify which thinking trap you fell into. Try it out! Do you tend fall into the same trap over and over again? If you do, then make sure to try to catch it to help you be more realistic in your thinking before you fall into the trap!

- 1. Mind reading:** You assume that you know what people think without having sufficient evidence of their thoughts. For example: "He thinks I'm a loser."
- 2. Fortune telling:** You predict the future—that things will get worse or that there is danger ahead. For example: "I'll fail that exam" or "I won't get the job."
- 3. Catastrophizing:** You believe that what has happened or will happen will be so awful and unbearable that you won't be able to stand it. For example: "It would be terrible if I failed."
- 4. Labeling:** You assign global negative traits to yourself and others. For example: "I'm undesirable" or "He's a rotten person."
- 5. Discounting positives:** You claim that the positive accomplishments you or others attain are trivial. For example: "That's what wives are supposed to do—so it doesn't count when she's nice to me" or "Those successes were easy, so they don't matter."
- 6. Negative filter:** You focus almost exclusively on the negatives and seldom notice the positives. For example: "Look at all of the people who don't like me."
- 7. Overgeneralizing:** You perceive a global pattern of negatives on the basis of a single incident. For example: "This generally happens to me. I seem to fail at a lot of things."
- 8. Dichotomous thinking:** You view events, or people, in all-or-nothing terms. For example: "I get rejected by everyone" or "It was a waste of time."
- 9. "Shoulds":** You interpret events in terms of how things should be rather than simply focusing on what is. For example: "I should do well. If I don't, then I'm a failure."
- 10. Personalizing:** You attribute a disproportionate amount of the blame for negative events to yourself and fail to see that certain events are also caused by others. For example: "My marriage ended because I failed."

11. Blaming: You focus on the other person as the source of your negative feelings and you refuse to take responsibility for changing yourself. For example: "She's to blame for the way I feel now" or "My parents caused all my problems."

12. Unfair comparisons: You interpret events in terms of standards that are unrealistic by focusing primarily on others who do better than you and then judging yourself inferior in the comparison. For example: "She's more successful than I am" or "Others did better than I did on the test."

13. Regret orientation: You focus on the idea that you could have done better in the past, rather than on what you could do better now. For example: "I could have had a better job if I had tried" or "I shouldn't have said that."

14. What if?: You ask a series of questions about "what if" something happens, and you are never satisfied with any of the answers. For example: "Yeah, but what if I get anxious?" Or "What if I can't catch my breath?"

15. Emotional reasoning: You let your feelings guide your interpretation of reality. For example, "I feel depressed; therefore, my marriage is not working out."

16. Inability to disconfirm: You reject any evidence or arguments that might contradict your negative thoughts. For example, when you have the thought "I'm unlovable," you reject as irrelevant any evidence that people like you. Consequently, your thought cannot be refuted. Another example: "That's not the real issue. There are deeper problems. There are other factors."

17. Judgment focus: You view yourself, others, and events in terms of black/white evaluations (good-bad or superior-inferior) rather than simply describing, accepting, or understanding. You are continually measuring yourself and others according to arbitrary standards and finding that you and others fall short. You are focused on the judgments of others as well as your own judgments of yourself. For example: "I didn't perform well in college" or "If I take up tennis, I won't do well" or "Look how successful she is. I'm not successful."