

CBT: Common Cognitive Distortions

Recognize thinking habits that can amplify anxiety, depression, shame, and conflict.

Common patterns

- All-or-nothing thinking: seeing only extremes.
- Catastrophizing: jumping to the worst possible outcome.
- Mind reading: assuming you know what another person thinks.
- Fortune telling: treating a prediction as a fact.
- Overgeneralizing: turning one event into an “always” or “never.”
- Discounting positives: dismissing evidence that does not fit a negative belief.
- Should statements: rigid rules about how you or others must behave.
- Personalization: taking excessive responsibility for events with many causes.

How to respond

- Name the pattern without arguing with yourself.
- Return to specific facts rather than global conclusions.
- Estimate probabilities instead of using words like “definitely.”
- Look for a balanced statement that includes both difficulty and coping ability.
- Choose behavior based on goals and values, not only on the distorted prediction.

Example

Thought: “I made one mistake, so I am terrible at my job.” A more balanced response might be: “I made a mistake that needs attention. One error does not summarize my overall competence.”

Try this reflection

Which distortion appears most often when you are stressed? What phrase could help you catch it earlier?

Using this resource: For education and skill-building only; not diagnosis, medical advice, or crisis care. If you feel overwhelmed, pause and seek appropriate professional support. In the U.S., call or text 988 for crisis support; call 911 for an immediate emergency.