

unhealthy thought patterns

all-or-nothing thinking

Also known as black or white thinking, this thought pattern is grounded in extremes. One misstep on a diet is grounds for complete abandonment of a healthy lifestyle. Falling short of perfection translates into complete failure. Common vocabulary includes words such as never, always and forever instead of more accurate and realistic descriptions.

overgeneralization

One unwanted event or experience leads to the general conclusion that nothing ever goes right. A low grade in school, a rejection from a love interest or criticism at work can be generalized into feelings of defeat and failure. Since all other cases will be the same, you lose the motivation to take risks and keep trying.

mental filter

Everything goes right but one little detail was off. Rather than feeling good and focusing on the positive, you dwell on the one negative detail. You don't choose what happens to you, but you can choose how you respond. If you filter out all of the positives, you will miss out on all of the great things life has to offer.

disqualifying the positive

By disqualifying the positive, you turn even the best things in life into a negative. A good job is never good enough. Even if you achieve your goals, you minimize your accomplishments and believe anyone could've done what you did. A common example is assuming someone compliments you only because they want something.

jumping to conclusions

Even in the absence of facts, you have a negative interpretation. For example, you arbitrarily conclude that someone dislikes you despite a lack of evidence. Or perhaps you assume that something will go wrong – you'll fail a test or get passed over for a promotion – to protect yourself from possible disappointment. In most cases, these worries and fears are wholly unfounded and never come to fruition.

magnification & minimization

In addition to minimizing your positive traits, you exaggerate your shortcomings or problems. Focusing on the bigger picture will help keep the minor mistakes and problems in perspective.

emotional reasoning

Feelings are treated like facts in your mind, rather than subjective perceptions that change over time. For example, feelings of guilt mean you're a terrible person and being afraid of something means you're in real danger.

should statements

You feel disappointed, guilty, frustrated or angry when things don't go the way you had hoped or expected. Self-talk commonly includes words such as should, must, have to and ought to. In addition to having unrealistic expectations for yourself, you demand a lot from others and get upset when they fall short. Should statements can be combated by working on the things you can change and accepting the rest.

labeling & mislabeling

Labeling relies on the premise that you are what you do. Rather than describing specific actions and behaviors, you give yourself (and others) a label. For example, making a mistake earns you the label of "loser" or "failure" in your own mind. Labels are abstractions that serve little purpose other than to frustrate and lower self-esteem. Sometimes they become self-fulfilling prophecies. When directed at others, labels allow you to brand people as "bad" rather than recognizing a problem with their thinking or behavior (or your own).

personalization

An event that isn't entirely within your control becomes your fault because you hold yourself personally responsible. If a child gets a poor grade in school, the mother may tell herself that this shows what a bad mom she is instead of helping her child. Personalization commonly leads to feelings of shame, inadequacy and guilt. Some people go to the other extreme, blaming others for their problems rather than accepting their role.