

Thinking Traps



15 Minutes



This tool explains some of the most common thinking traps and encourages you to reflect on the occasions where you might have engaged in such distorted thinking.

Thinking Traps	Replace this with...
<p>All-Or-Nothing:</p> <p>Seeing everything as black and white: a situation is either good or bad, success or failure – there is no middle ground. Using absolute terms such as always, never and forever.</p> <p>Example: “I didn’t get this job, I am a total failure in my career.”</p>	<p>“Even though I didn’t get the job, it doesn’t mean I’m a failure. Other opportunities will be available in the future. I’ll keep improving my skills so that I’ll be ready for them when they arrive. One setback does not mean that my career is over.”</p>
<p>Emotional Reasoning:</p> <p>Believing your emotions to be the evidence of truth. Assuming that your negative feelings reflect the way you or things really are. Example: “I feel useless, so I must be useless.”</p>	<p>“My feelings are not evidence for how reality really is. I can accept my feelings but still move on. Just because I feel overwhelmed and useless right now, does not mean that I truly am useless.”</p>
<p>Mind Reading:</p> <p>Believing that you know what others are thinking of you. Automatically assuming that they are thinking something negative about you (without having any evidence for it).</p> <p>Example: “They all make fun about me behind my back.”</p>	<p>“I cannot read their minds. I do not know whether they like me or not until I give them a chance and find out. There can be other reasons for why we haven’t connected yet.”</p>
<p>Catastrophising /Jumping To Conclusions:</p> <p>Predicting that things will turn out badly and preparing early for the disappointment. You interpret things negatively when there are no facts to support your conclusion.</p> <p>Example: Your are meeting someone for dinner. They are late. You think: “I must have done something wrong. They don’t like me. They won’t come”.</p>	<p>“ I cannot predict the future. I should give the person the benefit of the doubt - Maybe they are just stuck in traffic.”</p>

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<p>Labelling:</p> <p>Wrongly attributing a negative label to either yourself or someone else rather than acknowledging it was just a single event or mistake. Labelling is an extreme form of all-or-nothing thinking.</p> <p>Example: Instead of saying “I made a mistake,” you attach a negative label to yourself (“I am a failure”).</p>	<p>“Everyone makes mistakes and this does not mean that I am a failure or will fail the next time. I can learn from this mistake and do better.”</p>
<p>Personalisation:</p> <p>Believing that everything others do or say is a direct reaction to something you’ve said or done. Holding yourself personally responsible for an event that isn’t entirely under your control.</p> <p>Example: “My partner looks exhausted and upset, I must have done something wrong.”</p>	<p>“I haven’t done anything wrong. It’s not always about me. He could have equally had an exhausting day at work and is tired now. I should go and ask him what’s up.”</p>
<p>Mental Filter:</p> <p>Focusing only on all the negative aspects of a situation and filtering out all of the positive ones.</p> <p>Example: “They all hated my presentation because that one colleague looked bored.”</p>	<p>“Most of them actually looked really engaged and asked questions. I even got some compliments. Maybe that colleague was just having a bad day.”</p>
<p>Discounting The Positive:</p> <p>Rejecting positive experiences or achievements by insisting that they “don’t count”. Taking the good in a situation and turning it into a negative. Feeling like you just don’t deserve it.</p> <p>Example: Your boss told you that you did a good job. You tell yourself, that it wasn’t good enough and that everyone could have done that.</p>	<p>“ I deserve this feedback and I should embrace it. I did well otherwise my boss wouldn’t tell me so. I should just say thank you and smile.”</p>

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Thinking Traps		Occasion(s) where I used that Thinking Trap	Replacement Thought
<input type="checkbox"/>	All-Or-Nothing		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Emotional Reasoning		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mind Reading		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Catastrophising / Jumping To Conclusions		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Labelling		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Personalisation		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mental Filter		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Discounting The Positive		

- ▶ Start with the first two pages. Look at each thinking trap and think about whether you have engaged in such distorted thinking before. Next to it are suggestions for replacing that thinking trap the next time you encounter a difficult situation.
- ▶ On the third page, place a check for each thinking trap that you recognise yourself in.
- ▶ Next to each thinking trap you checked, note down at least one specific occasion where you used that thinking trap in the past.



As you continue to identify and dispute your negative thinking over and over again, it will slowly disappear and be automatically replaced by more rational and balanced thinking.