

CHANGING THE 15 STYLES OF DISTORTED THINKING*

1. Filtering

Stop using words like terrible, awful, disgusting, horrendous, etc. Write out the phrase – “No need to magnify. I can cope. I can stand it.” Or say – “This is distressing, but not dangerous”.

To stop filtering, you have to shift focus. Place your attention on coping strategies to deal with the problem rather than obsessing on the problem itself. Focus on a theme such as Danger or Loss. Then think of things that represent safety or think of things that you have which are valuable.

2. Overgeneralization

Use a three column technique for overgeneralizations.

Evidence for my Conclusion	Evidence against my conclusion	Alternative conclusion
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Write on a 3 x 5 card, “There are No Absolutes” and put it on your desk. Challenge words like “all”, “every”, “never”, “always”, “nobody”, “everybody” by exaggerating them. Say: Do I really mean I never, never, never, etc.? Learn to use words like maybe, sometimes, often.

Check out nominalization by asking yourself if you could put it in a wheelbarrow. You couldn’t put a marriage or our country in a wheelbarrow. The statements, “My marriage is sick,” and “This country is going down the tubes,” involves the nominalization distortion.

3. Polarized Thinking

Use your “There Are No Absolutes” card for this one. Either/or is a form of absolutizing. Toxic shame is more than human or less than human. This is the basis of its grandiose thinking. There are no black and white judgments. The world is grey. Think in terms of percentages; for example, “About 5% of the time I’m selfish, but the rest of the time I’m loving and generous.

4. Mind Reading

Mind-reading is a form of imagining and fantasizing. In the long run you’re best off making no inferences about people. Treat all your interpretations about other people as hallucinations. Use that word when you give your interpretation. Say, “My fantasy or hallucination is...” The best policy is to check out the evidence for your conclusion.

5. Catastrophizing

The most logical counter to catastrophizing is an honest assessment in terms of realistic odds or percent of probability. What are the chances? One in a thousand (1%). One in ten thousand (.01%), or one in a 100,000 (.001%)?

6. Personalization

For example, force yourself to get evidence to prove what the boss’s frown means. Check it out if possible. Abandon the habit of comparing. Make no conclusion unless you have reasonable evidence and proof.

7. Control Fallacies

Aside from acts of God, you are responsible for what happens in your world. It is believed that neuroses and character disorders are disorders of responsibility. Learning to be responsible and to allow others that privilege is to live in reality. Ask yourself, “What choices have I made that resulted in this situation? What decisions can I now make to change it?” Also remember that respect for others means letting them live their own lives, suffer their own pains and solve their own problems.

CHANGING THE 15 STYLES OF DISTORTED THINKING (continued)

8. Fallacy of Fairness and

Use the exercise for “10. Shoulds” as well as learning and applying the following chart:

JUST	FAIR
Perfect agreement between nature and acts. God sees from beginning to end.	Sees right now, present time.
Based on God’s Words.	Based on changing society (feelings of society).
Establishes guilt when God’s standards are violated.	Tries to lower God’s standards.
Causes us to confess our faults and plead for mercy.	Causes us to justify our failures so we don’t think we need mercy.
Causes personal responsibility to a Holy God and produces revival.	Focus is on personal rights rather than responsibility.
Based on eternal values	Based on protecting temporal values.
Expression of God’s wisdom for our nation and leads to prosperity.	Expression of human needs and leads to destruction.
Impartial, not emotional.	Partial, very emotional.
Everyone is equal.	Everyone must be alike.
Holds individual guilty for offense.	Holds society guilty for offense.

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9. Blaming

Accept responsibility for your own behavior and choices. Focus on your own problems. Look at the beam in your own eye, rather than the speck in your brother's eye. When you start labeling, ask yourself, "What am I trying to avoid?" If you find you are not avoiding, be specific rather than global. (For example: "My boss is often conservative. He is rarely a risk-taker." This is accurate. Calling him a gutless dumbo is about your need to vent anger at your own situation by having to answer to him.

10. Shoulds

Use the words "should", "ought", and "must" as red flags. Flexible rules and expectations don't use these words because there are always exceptions and special circumstances. Rigidity is the mark of mental illness; flexibility is the mark of mental health. Without flexibility, there is no freedom.

Think of at least three exceptions to your rule and then imagine all the exceptions you can't even imagine.

11. Emotional Reasoning

Separate feeling from thinking. Your thinking must be based on truth and reality. Emotions can be triggered by events, by our own beliefs, by wounded parts of ourselves. Emotions are based on perception, not always accurate perceptions. Use exercises in the other categories to bring your thinking more balance.

12. Fallacy of Change

Use the same instructions as point 7 above.

13. Global Labeling

Use the same instructions as point 9 above.

14. Being Right

Own your own good healthy shame. If you're always right, you stop listening and learning. The key to overcoming being right is to become an active listener. As an active listener, you listen for the content as well as the process. You learn to listen with your ears as well as your eyes. You learn to give feedback and to check things out.

By listening and clarifying we learn to see things as another person sees them. The checking-out process helps us grasp the other's point of view. It is important to remember that others believe what they are saying as strongly as we believe our own convictions. Ask yourself, "What can I learn from the other person's opinion?"

15. Heaven's Reward Fallacy

Follow instructions for point 8 above.

**Based on work by John Bradshaw*