THE TRUSTED SPACE

Identifying Cognitive Distortions

Cognitive distortions are unhelpful thinking patterns that can negatively impact how we perceive situations, emotions, and ourselves. This cheatsheet will help you recognise some common cognitive distortions.

Types of Cognitive Distortions



All-Or-Nothing
seeing things in only extremes



Overgeneralisation
general conclusions based on experience



Mental Filter
focusing on negatives; dismissing positives



Mindreading
false prediction of others' thoughts



Should Statements
beliefs about how people ought to behave



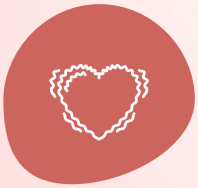
Labelling
generalising into a judgement



Rationalisation
creating excuses for situations



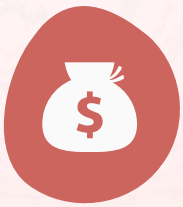
Personalisation
seeing yourself as the cause of events



Emotional Reasoning
believing negative feelings are real



Always Being Right
it's unacceptable to be wrong



Heaven's Reward Fallacy
rewards depend on how hard you work



Fallacy of Fairness
everything should be fair



Fallacy of Change
believing others should change



Catastrophising
magnifying the negative



Fortune Telling
predicting the worst



Blaming
holding others responsible

Let’s Identify Cognitive Distortions

Think about a recent situation that triggered stress or negative emotions. Write the thought that came up and check which distortion(s) apply.

Situation/trigger
Unhelpful thought

- ☐ All-or-nothing
- ☐ Overgeneralisation
- ☐ Mental filter
- ☐ Mindreading
- ☐ Should statements
- ☐ Labelling
- ☐ Rationalisation
- ☐ Personalisation
- ☐ Emotional reasoning
- ☐ Always being right
- ☐ Heaven’s reward fallacy
- ☐ Fallacy of fairness
- ☐ Fallacy of change
- ☐ Catastrophising
- ☐ Fortune telling
- ☐ Blaming
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Other

Now that you've identified which cognitive distortions may be influencing your thoughts, you can take the first step to changing them.

Ask yourself:

- Is this thought based on facts or assumptions?
- What evidence do I have that contradicts this thought?
- How would I view this situation if I were being kinder to myself?

By questioning and reframing unhelpful thoughts, you can begin to develop a more balanced perspective. With practice, identifying cognitive distortions will become second nature, helping you to respond to challenges with greater resilience.