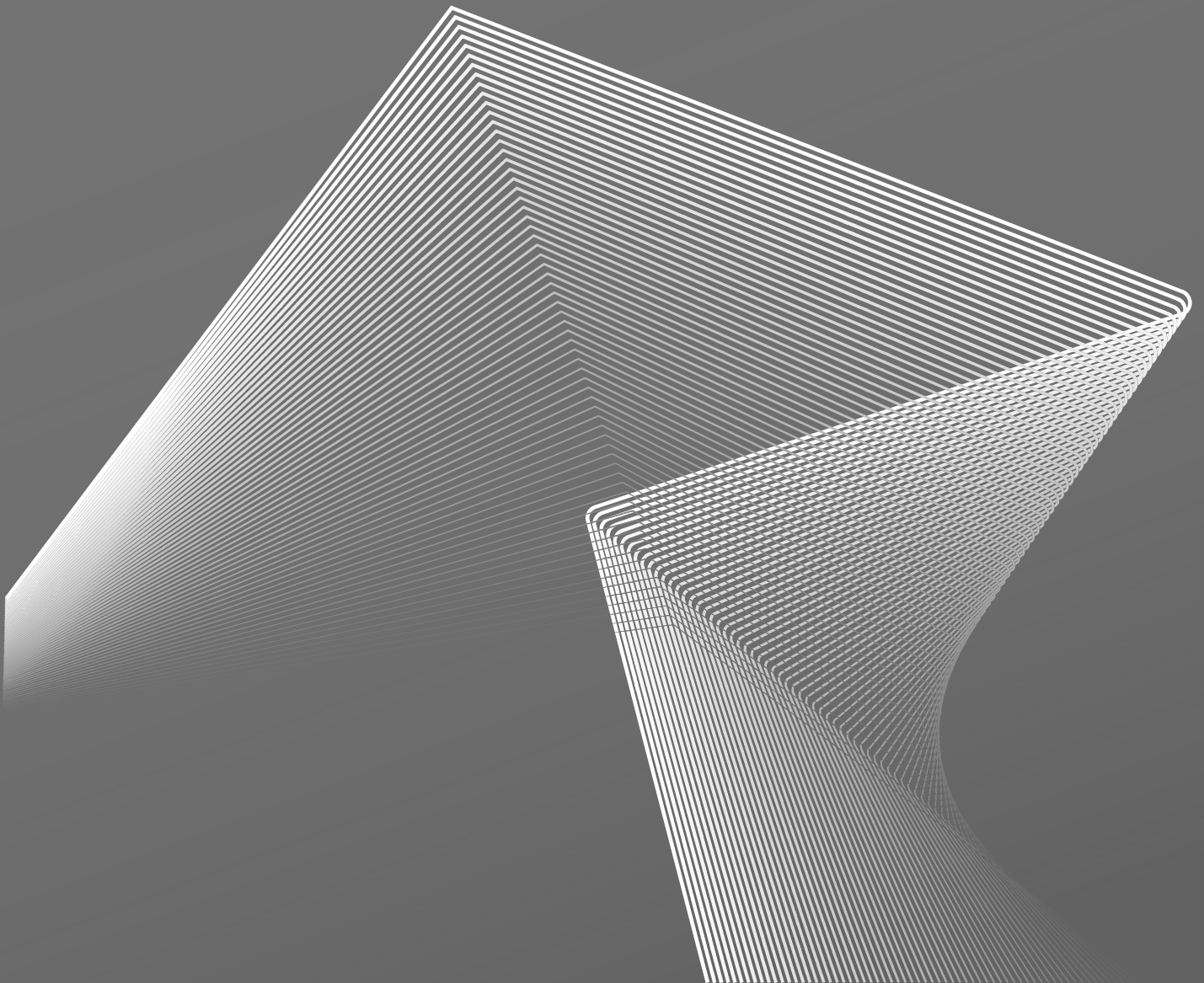


PSYCHOLOGY**T****L****S**

# Unhelpful Thinking Styles

American English



# Unhelpful Thinking Styles

## Description

Cognitive distortions are characteristic thinking styles associated with emotional disturbance. Cognitive theory argues that biased thinking and biased information processing affects what an individual perceives. This leads to biased decision-making, biased emotion, and biased action. Distorted thinking in depression was identified by Aaron Beck in 1960's and integrated into his cognitive theory. David Burns published a more detailed analysis of cognitive bias in *Feeling Good* (1980). This *Unhelpful Thinking Styles* information handout gives details of 10 common cognitive distortions. Some clients find the label of 'unhelpful thinking styles' as less pejorative than 'cognitive distortions' or 'thinking errors'.

## Instructions

This is a Psychology Tools information handout. Suggested uses include:

- Client handout – use as a psychoeducation resource
- Discussion point – use to provoke a discussion and explore client beliefs
- Therapist learning tool – improve your familiarity with a psychological construct
- Teaching resource – use as a learning tool during training

## References

- Beck, A. T. (1964). Thinking and depression. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 10, 561-571.
- Burns, D. (1980). *Feeling good: the new mood therapy*. New York: Morrow.

# Unhelpful Thinking Styles

## All or nothing thinking

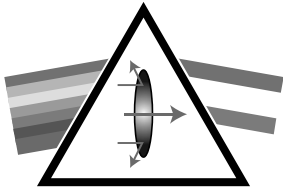


Sometimes called 'black and white thinking'

*If I'm not perfect I have failed*

*Either I do it right or not at all*

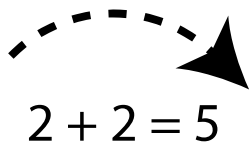
## Mental filter



Only paying attention to certain types of evidence

*Noticing our failures but not seeing our successes*

## Jumping to conclusions



There are two key types of jumping to conclusions:

- **Mind reading**  
(imagining we know what others are thinking)
- **Fortune telling**  
(predicting the future)

## Over-generalising



Seeing a pattern based upon a single event, or being overly broad in the conclusions we draw

## Disqualifying the positive



Discounting the good things that have happened or that you have done for some reason or another

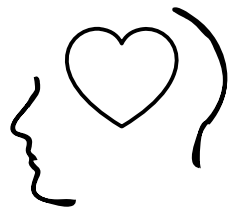
*That doesn't count*

## Magnification (catastrophising) & minimization



Blowing things out of proportion (catastrophising), or inappropriately shrinking something to make it seem less important

## Emotional reasoning



Assuming that because we feel a certain way what we think must be true

*I feel embarrassed so I must be an idiot*

# should must

Using critical words like 'should', 'must', or 'ought' can make us feel guilty, or like we have already failed

If we apply 'shoulds' to other people the result is often frustration

## Labelling



Assigning labels to ourselves or other people

*I'm a loser*

*I'm completely useless*

*They're such an idiot*

## Personalisation

# "this is my fault"

Blaming yourself or taking responsibility for something that wasn't completely your fault

Conversely, blaming other people for something that was your fault

# Unhelpful Thinking Styles

 <p><b>All or nothing thinking</b></p>	<p>Thinking in extremes. For example, something is either 100% good or bad</p>
 <p><b>Catastrophizing</b></p>	<p>Jumping to the worst possible conclusion</p>
 <p><b>Over-generalizing</b></p>	<p>Seeing a pattern based upon a single event</p>
 <p><b>Mental filter</b></p>	<p>Only paying attention to certain types of evidence (<i>"that doesn't count"</i>)</p>
 <p><b>Disqualifying the positive</b></p>	<p>Discounting positive information or twisting a positive into a negative</p>
 <p><b>Jumping to conclusions</b></p>	<p>Mind reading or predicting the future</p>
 <p><b>Low frustration tolerance</b></p>	<p>Saying things like "this is too difficult", "this is unbearable" or "I can't stand it"</p>
 <p><b>Minimization</b></p>	<p>Discounting the importance of something</p>
 <p><b>Emotional reasoning</b></p>	<p>Assuming that because we feel a certain way our hunch must be true</p>
<p><b>SHOULD MUST</b></p> <p><b>Demands</b></p>	<p>Using words like 'should', 'must', and 'ought'</p>
 <p><b>Labelling</b></p>	<p>Assigning labels to ourselves or others (<i>"I'm rubbish"</i>)</p>
<p><b>"this is my fault"</b></p> <p><b>Personalization</b></p>	<p>Taking too much or too little responsibility</p>

**Contact us**

contact@psychologytools.com

**Terms & conditions**

This document may be used by members of Psychology Tools, and their clients, in accordance with the terms specified in their user licence. For full terms and conditions see: <https://psychologytools.com>

**Disclaimer**

The information in this document does not constitute advice and should not be relied upon in making, or refraining from making, any decision. Psychology Tools accepts no liability for any consequences arising from the use of any resources: good practice guidelines suggest that professionals should work within the bounds of their own competencies. Psychology Tools resources are intended to support good practice, not to replace it.

**Copyright**

Unless otherwise stated, this document is Copyright © 2018 Psychology Tools. All rights reserved.