Cognitive distortions

Don't believe everything you think

Cognitive Distortions are ways of thinking that negatively skew the way in which we see the world. These negative thoughts reinforce negative self-talk or emotions. Aaron Beck first proposed the theory behind cognitive distortions.

Below is a list of the Top 10 Cognitive Distortions:

Which of these do you do?

1 - All or Nothing Thinking: Seeing things as black-or-white, right-or-wrong with nothing in-between. Essentially, if I'm not perfect then I'm a failure.

Examples
- I didn't finish writing that paper so it was a complete waste of time.
- There's no point in playing if I'm not 100% in shape.
- They didn't show, they're completely unreliable!

2 - Overgeneralization: Using words like always or never in relation to a single event or experience.

Examples
- I'll never get that promotion
- She always does that…

3 - Minimising or Magnifying (Also Catastrophizing): Seeing things as dramatically more or less important than they actually are. Often creating a "catastrophe" that follows.

Examples
- Because my boss publicly thanked her she'll get that promotion, not me (even though I had a great performance review and just won an industry award).
- I forgot that email! That means my boss won't trust me again, I won't get that raise and my wife will leave me.

4 - "Shoulds/Musts": Using "should", "need to", "must", "ought to" to motivate oneself, then feeling guilty when you don't follow through (or anger and resentment when someone else doesn't follow through).

Examples
- I should have got the painting done this weekend.
- They ought to have been more considerate of my feelings, they should know that would upset me.

5 - Labelling: Attaching a negative label to yourself or others following a single event.

Examples
- I didn't stand up to my co-worker, I'm such a wimp!
- What an idiot, he couldn't even see that coming!

6 - Jumping to Conclusions:

    a) **Mind-Reading:** Making negative assumptions about how people see you without evidence or factual support.

Examples
Your friend is preoccupied and you don't bother to find out why. You're thinking:
- She thinks I'm exaggerating again   or   • He still hasn't forgiven me for telling Fred about his illness.

b)   Fortune Telling: Making negative predictions about the future without evidence or factual support

Examples
- I won't be able to sell my house and I'll be stuck here (even though housing market is good).
- No-one will understand. I won't be invited back again (even though they are supportive friends).

7 - Discounting the Positive: Not acknowledging the positive. Saying anyone could have done it or insisting that your positive actions, qualities or achievements don't count…

Examples
- That doesn't count, anyone could have done it.
- I've only cut back from smoking 40 cigarettes a day to 10. It doesn't count because I've not fully given up yet.

8 - Blame & Personalization: Blaming yourself when you weren't entirely responsible or blaming other people and denying your role in the situation

Examples
- If only I was younger, I would have got the job
- If only I hadn't said that, they wouldn't have…
- If only she hadn't yelled at me, I wouldn't have been angry and wouldn't have had that car accident.

9 - Emotional Reasoning: I feel, therefore I am. Assuming that a feeling is true - without digging deeper to see if this is accurate.

Examples
- I feel such an idiot (it must be true).
- I feel guilty (I must have done something wrong).
- I feel really bad for yelling at my partner, I must be really selfish and inconsiderate.

10 - Mental Filter: Allowing (dwelling on) one negative detail or fact to spoil our enjoyment, happiness, hope etc

Example
- You have a great evening and dinner at a restaurant with friends, but your chicken was undercooked and that spoiled the whole evening.