# COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

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**NAME:** _____          **DATE:** _____

The language we use in everyday life both represents and impacts how we experience our world. We attempt to capture thoughts and ideas to describe what we see around us, but sometimes things get lost in translation. We lose information from cognitive distortions. Cognitive refers to our thought and thinking patterns, while distortion refers to skewed perspective to some aspects and ideas. We all do this consciously and unconsciously, and how we do this provides pointers to our underlying beliefs about ourselves, others, and the world.

## Here 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.
   - 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, never in relation to a single event or experience.
   - I'll *never* get that promotion                    • She *always* does that…

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

4. **"Shoulds":** 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).
   - *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.
   - 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:**

   **1) Mind-Reading:** Making negative assumptions about how people see you without evidence or factual support. Your friend is preoccupied, and you don't bother to find out why. You're thinking:
   - She *thinks I'm exaggerating* again          • He still *hasn't forgiven me* for telling Fred about his illness.

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

- I *won't be able* to sell my house and *I'll be stuck* here (even though the 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…

- 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 stopped.

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

- *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 it's accurate.

- 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.

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

**Can you identify with any of these distortions?**

**Which distortions do you use most often?**