



Types of Cognitive Errors

Here are some of the common thought habits that cause distress, including anxiety and depression, based on the works of CBT notables Aaron Beck and David Burn:

- **ALL OR NOTHING THINKING:** Things are seen as black and white terms, where there are no shades of gray. If you make a mistake, you think that you "failed" and/or are a "failure". Example: "I am a bad mother."

- **BLAMING:** You blame yourself or others for the problems in your life, giving up control of your feelings and reactions. This is "victim" mentality. Example: "He makes me miserable!"

- **DISCOUNTING THE POSITIVE:** In a given situation, you focus only on the negative. Example: "Even though she asked me to mentor a coworker because of my competence, she does not realize I really do not know a lot."

- **EMOTIONAL REASONING:** You lose objectivity and stick to your interpretations based on your emotions and negative self-image rather than sticking to the objective facts. Example: "I feel like a stupid person so I AM a stupid person."

- **FALLACY OF FAIRNESS:** You expect life to be fair. Example: "Life should be fair and I should get what I deserve."

- **FORTUNE TELLING:** You predict a negative outcome in the future based on your distorted way of thinking. You think you know what will happen without any real evidence. Example: "I'll never love again."

- **JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS:** Without checking the facts, your conclusions immediately interpret a situation idiosyncratically in line with your negative way of thinking. Example: "He didn't call me – He must be breaking up with me."

- **LABELING:** You label yourself or others by terms such as "lazy" "fat" "stupid" "loser" "jerk", stating them like they are facts. A label becomes erroneously an evaluation of self-worth. Example: "I'm just fat and lazy" and "He is a jerk."

- **MAGNIFICATION OR MINIMIZATION:** You either blow things out of proportion or deny something is a problem when it is. Examples: "It's nothing – Not a big deal (when it really is to you)." And "It's AWFUL that she said that!"

- **MENTAL FILTER:** You pick out a negative single issue and dwell on it, like a drop of ink that discolors a whole beaker of water. Example: "My big nose makes me so unattractive."

- **MIND READING:** You think with certainty that you know what and why others think and feel. Example: "He is just trying to show me up!"

- **OVER-CATASTROPHIZING:** This is when people assume the worst and exaggerate an issue. If you made a mistake you see yourself as a failure. Example: "She's mad at me – I can't ever face her again."

- **OVERGENERALIZATION:** You generalize from a specific. You think in absolutes, like "always" "never" and see a single negative event as a never-ending pattern. Example: "Nobody likes me."

- Personalization: Interpretations are distorted and you think things are about you when it is just an interpretation. You think if someone is angry or negative you take responsibility for things out of your control. Example: "It's my fault that my child is depressed."
- Playing the Comparison Game: Comparing yourself to others and needing to keep up with, or outshine others to feel good about yourself. Example: "He is so much smarter than me – I'm stupid."
- Should Statements: Having pre-conditions on how you and other people "should" be. Judgmental and unforgiving expectations using "musts" and "shoulds" create a lot of anxiety. Examples: "I shouldn't be so upset about this." "He should know that already!"

Write some examples of your own unhealthy thoughts and note which one or more cognitive errors fit.

IRRATIONAL THOUGHTS (I am weird and always will be)	TYPE OF COGNITIVE ERRORS (Labeling, Fortune Telling, All or Nothing Thinking)