

Cognitive Distortions Handout



What are Cognitive Distortions? Cognitive distortions are irrational thoughts that can influence your emotions and behavior. They are biased perspectives we take on ourselves and the world around us. These patterns of thinking can be subtle and difficult to recognize, but they can have a significant impact on our mental health

Common Types of Cognitive Distortions:

1. **All-or-Nothing Thinking:** Viewing situations in black-and-white terms, without recognizing any middle ground.
2. **Overgeneralization:** Making broad interpretations from a single or few events.
3. **Mental Filter:** Focusing exclusively on negative aspects and ignoring positive ones.
4. **Disqualifying the Positive:** Rejecting positive experiences by insisting they "don't count."
5. **Jumping to Conclusions:** Making assumptions without evidence. This includes mind reading (assuming others' thoughts) and fortune telling (predicting the future negatively).
6. **Magnification and Minimization:** Exaggerating the importance of negative events or minimizing the importance of positive events.
7. **Emotional Reasoning:** Assuming negative emotions reflect the truth about a situation.
8. **Should Statements:** Using "should," "must," or "ought to" statements that set unrealistic expectations.
9. **Labeling and Mislabeled:** Assigning labels to ourselves or others based on one incident.
10. **Personalization:** Blaming yourself for events outside your control.

The Neuroscience of Cognitive Distortions:

Cognitive distortions are influenced by the brain's neural pathways, which are formed and strengthened over time based on our experiences and beliefs⁴. These pathways can lead to biased or irrational thinking, as they become more ingrained and automatic⁴. The brain's prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for higher-order thinking and decision-making, plays a key role in regulating these thought patterns⁴. When cognitive distortions occur, there is often an imbalance in the activity of the prefrontal cortex and the amygdala, the brain's emotional center⁴. This imbalance can lead to heightened emotional responses and distorted thinking⁴.

How to Reduce Cognitive Distortions:

- Identify the Distortion: Recognize and name the cognitive distortion you are experiencing.
- Challenge the Distortion: Question the evidence for and against the distorted thought.

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- Replace with Balanced Thoughts: Substitute the distortion with more balanced and realistic thoughts.
- Practice Mindfulness: Stay present and observe your thoughts without judgment.
- Seek Professional Help: Consider therapy, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), to work on these patterns.

Using Socratic Questioning:

Socratic questioning is a technique used to challenge and reframe cognitive distortions. It involves asking yourself a series of open-ended questions to explore the validity of your thoughts and beliefs. Here are some questions you can use:

1. What is the evidence for and against this thought?
2. Am I basing my thoughts on facts or feelings?
3. Is this thought realistic?
4. Could I be misinterpreting the evidence?
5. Am I viewing the situation in black-and-white terms, or is there a middle ground?
6. What alternative explanations could there be?
7. What would I tell a friend if they had this thought?
8. What are the potential consequences of thinking this way?
9. How might I view this situation if I were feeling calmer?

Worksheet Example:

Situation	Distorted Thought	Cognitive Distortion	Evidence For	Evidence Against	Balanced Thought	Socratic Questions
Example: I failed a test.	I'm a failure.	All-or-Nothing Thinking	I didn't pass the test.	I did well on other tests.	I didn't do well on this test, but I can improve with more study.	What is the evidence for and against this thought? Am I basing my thoughts on facts or feelings?

Worksheet:

Feel free to print and use this handout and worksheet to help you or others learn about cognitive distortions and how to manage them.

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Situation	Distorted Thought	Cognitive Distortion	Evidence For	Evidence Against	Balanced Thought	Socratic Questions

Extras

Content Sources:

1. How to Identify and Challenge Cognitive Distortions

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2. [Understanding Cognitive Distortions: The Neuroscience Perspective](#)
3. [Understanding your Cognitive Distortions | Nandita Bhaskhar](#)
4. [Cognitive Distortions in Memory and Perception | MindLAB Neuroscience](#)
5. [How to Stop Toxic Thinking: Cognitive Distortions and Neuroscience](#)

Further Reading and Resources:

1. Cognitive Distortions | SpringerLink

This article provides an overview of cognitive distortions, their definitions, and their impact on mental health. It also discusses the cognitive model developed by Aaron T. Beck and the role of cognitive distortions in mental disorders.

2. Investigation of the relatedness of cognitive distortions with emotional expression, anxiety, and depression | Current Psychology

This study investigates the relationship between cognitive distortions, emotional expression, anxiety, and depression. It provides insights into how cognitive distortions affect mental health and emotional well-being.

3. 15 Common Cognitive Distortions (Psych Central)

This article outlines 15 common cognitive distortions and provides examples of each. It is a useful resource for understanding the different types of cognitive distortions and how they manifest.

4. 10 Proven Methods for Fixing Cognitive Distortions

This article discusses various methods for addressing and correcting cognitive distortions. It offers practical strategies for challenging and changing distorted thinking patterns.

5. Overcoming Cognitive Distortions: How to Recognize and Challenge the Thinking Traps that Make You Miserable

This article explores how to recognize and challenge cognitive distortions. It provides techniques for overcoming distorted thinking and improving mental health.

These articles should provide you with a comprehensive understanding of cognitive distortions and how to address them.