Common Cognitive Distortions

1. **All or nothing thinking** (also called black and white, dichotomous thinking): view a situation in only two categories instead of on a continuum.

2. **Catastrophizing** (fortune telling): you predict the future negatively without considering other, more likely outcomes.

3. **Disqualifying or discounting the positive**: you unreasonably tell yourself that positive experiences, deeds, or qualities do not count.

4. **Emotional reasoning**: you think something must be true because you "feel" it so strongly, ignoring or discounting evidence to the contrary.

5. **Labeling**: fixed, global label on yourself or others without considering that the evidence might more reasonably lead to a less disastrous conclusion.

6. **Magnification/minimization**: when you evaluate yourself, another person or a situation, you unreasonably magnify the negative and/or minimize the positive.

7. **Mental filter** (selective abstraction): you pay undue attention to one negative detail instead of seeing the whole picture.

8. **Mind reading**: you believe you know what others are thinking, failing to consider other, more likely possibilities.

9. **Overgeneralization**: you make a sweeping negative conclusion that goes far beyond the current situation.

10. **Personalization**: you believe others are behaving negatively because of you, without considering more plausible explanations for their behavior.

11. **Should or must statements** (imperatives): you have a precise, fixed idea of how you or others should behave and you overestimate how bad it is that these expectations are not met.

12. **Tunnel vision**: you only see the negative aspects of a situation.

Protestants might find "Our Father who art in Heaven" calming. "Isha'allah" might be repeated by Muslims, and "Om" by members of the Hindu religion. Secular or non-religious people were encouraged to focus on words, phrases, or sounds that were compelling to them, such as the words *love, peace,* or *calm.* We learned that phrases learned in childhood could be particularly powerful, evoking the calm and security felt, for example, when in the presence of loving parents and family. In this way, we observed that all types of people were able to incorporate their own belief systems and values into evoking the Relaxation Response.

How to Elicit the Relaxation Response

In my most recent book, *Timeless Healing: The Power and Biology of Belief* (Scribner, 1996), Marg Stark and I provide updated instructions for eliciting the Relaxation Response. After twenty-some years of refining my understanding of our remarkable physiologic capability, we found that the two essential steps to eliciting the Relaxation Response are:

1. Repetition of a word, sound, phrase, prayer, or muscular activity.

2. Passively disregarding everyday thoughts that inevitably come to mind and returning to your repetition.

This is the generic technique I have taught patients and that I have used myself for many years:

1. Pick a focus word, short phrase, or prayer that is firmly rooted in your belief system.

2. Sit quietly in a comfortable position.

3. Close your eyes.

4. Relax your muscles, progressing from your feet to your calves, thighs, abdomen, shoulders, head, and neck.

5. Breathe slowly and naturally, and as you do, say your focus word, sound, phrase, or prayer silently to yourself as you exhale.

6. Assume a passive attitude. Don't worry about how well you're doing. When other thoughts come to mind, simply say to yourself, "Oh well," and gently return to your repetition.

7. Continue for ten to twenty minutes.

8. Do not stand immediately. Continue sitting quietly for a minute or so, allowing other thoughts to return.

Law & Order, Psychology Edition: Fixing Your Thoughts

Have you ever wanted to put someone on trial? What about your irrational thoughts — cognitive distortions — that lead into a pattern of feeling bad about yourself or others?

By putting your thoughts on trial using this worksheet, you can record your cognitive distortions — irrational, automatic thoughts that are causing you harm — and answer them with evidence and facts that refute the distorted thought.

The Crime: Describe the upsetting Event:

The Defense:
What Automatic Thoughts did you have about this Event?

The Prosecution:
Identify the name of the Cognitive Distortion and a rational response — a more realistic thought — that refutes the Automatic Thought.

The Verdict:
Is the rational response more fair — to yourself and others -- and a more mindful way in thinking about the event?

Learn more: psychcentral.com/lib/fixing-cognitive-distortions

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Cost-Benefit Analysis: Fixing Your Thoughts

Use this worksheet to use the cost-benefit analysis method for working on an attitude or irrational belief that you would like to change.

The Attitude or Belief I Want to Change:

Advantages of Believing This:

Disadvantages of Believing This:

My Revised Attitude:

Learn more: psychcentral.com/lib/fixing-cognitive-distortions

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Exercise 2

Use the performance feedback sheet (figure 2-1) or a similar sheet, to process the information that you accumulate from the perfor-

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Performance: _____ Date: _____

1. How anxious were you before today's performance?  0_____ 5_____10
                                                      low  not bad  high

2. What were the things that caused you stress?

3. When did you feel most stress—before, during, after?

4. How did you experience the stress? In thoughts, feelings, actions?

5. How did you manage your anxiety? How effective were you in controlling
   it using these techniques?

6. Describe in detail your self-talk. Remember key words and phrases you
   used.

7. What, if anything, have you learned from this performance that will help
   you plan for the next one? If you can, remember the details.
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Figure 2-1. Sample performance feedback sheet.

Left Hemisphere
(The Analyzer)

Right Hemisphere
(The Synthesizer)

Logic
Analytical thinking

Insight
Synthesis
Automaticity
Control by goal
Programming
Living in the present
Parallel processing
Effortless flow

Planning vocal strategies
Thinking of future and
past events

Details, specificity
Vocal technical instructions

Suggestibility
Feel
Touch
Tempo
Intuition
Creativity

Determination
Trying
Effort
Evaluation
Criticism
Objectivity

Nonverbal understanding
Positive feedback
Metaphors
Modeling
Body language
Doer

Verbal
Instructor

Triggers
Imagery
Kinesthetic images