Cognitive Distortions

Unhelpful thinking habits.

Our thoughts are not always true. Some habits of thinking make us feel worse. They are called **cognitive distortions**. Naming the habit is the first step.

1. All-or-nothing thinking

You see things only in extremes: total success or total failure. There is no middle ground.

Example: "I made one small mistake, so the whole job was a failure."

2. Overgeneralizing

One bad thing happens, and you decide it will always be this way. Watch for "always" and "never."

Example: "I felt nervous today. I will never be able to do this."

3. Mental filter

You pick out one negative detail and think only about it. The good parts are pushed out of view.

Example: "My boss praised my work but noted one error. All I can think about is the error."

4. Discounting the positive

Good things happen, but you tell yourself they do not count — just luck, or people being kind.

Example: "I did well, but anyone could have done it. It does not count."

5. Mind reading

You feel sure you know what others are thinking without checking.

Example: "She did not answer my message. She must be angry with me."

6. Fortunetelling

You predict that things will turn out badly. You treat the prediction as if it were already a fact.

Example: "I will feel terrible at the party. There is no point in going."

7. Catastrophizing

You expect the worst possible result. A small worry grows, step by step, into a disaster.

Example: "My son is late. What if something terrible has happened to him?"

8. Emotional reasoning

You take a feeling as proof that something is true. Because you feel it strongly, you believe it.

Example: "I feel guilty, so I must have done something wrong."

9. "Should" statements

You hold strict rules for how you and others must act. A broken rule brings guilt, anger, or shame.

Example: "I should handle this alone. I should never need help."

10. Labeling

Based on one event, you put a fixed label on a person. The label feels like the whole truth.

Example: "I forgot the meeting. I am a failure."

11. Personalizing and blaming

You blame yourself for things you did not control. Or you blame others fully, and miss your own part.

Example: "My daughter is quiet. It must be something I did."

This week: When a negative thought comes, ask yourself: "Is one of these habits at work?" Then check the thought on your Thought Record.