



FaithWorks Counseling

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Cognitive Distortions: Understanding Unhelpful Thought Patterns

Cognitive distortions are **inaccurate or biased ways of thinking** that often reinforce negative emotions, unhealthy behaviors, and maladaptive coping. They are automatic thought patterns that can cause individuals to interpret situations in overly negative, rigid, or unhelpful ways. By identifying and challenging cognitive distortions, you can develop healthier thinking habits and improve emotional well-being.

Common Cognitive Distortions

1. All-or-Nothing Thinking

- Viewing situations in extremes (e.g., "If I'm not perfect, I'm a total failure.")

2. Overgeneralization

- Drawing broad conclusions from one negative experience (e.g., "I always mess things up.")

3. Mental Filtering

- Focusing only on the negatives and ignoring the positives (e.g., "I got one criticism, so my whole performance was bad.")

4. Discounting the Positive

- Minimizing positive experiences or accomplishments (e.g., "I only did well because it was easy.")

5. Jumping to Conclusions

- Assuming the worst without evidence. This includes:
 - **Mind Reading:** Assuming you know what others are thinking (e.g., "They think I'm boring.")
 - **Fortune Telling:** Predicting negative outcomes without proof (e.g., "I'll fail that test no matter what.")

6. Magnification (Catastrophizing) or Minimization

- Exaggerating the importance of negative events or downplaying positive ones (e.g., "This mistake will ruin everything.")

7. Emotional Reasoning

- Believing that feelings reflect reality (e.g., "I feel useless, so I must be useless.")

8. Should Statements

- Creating unrealistic expectations for yourself or others (e.g., "I should always be in control.")

9. Labeling

- Attaching harsh labels to yourself or others based on one experience (e.g., "I'm a loser.")

10. Personalization

- Blaming yourself for events beyond your control or assuming excessive responsibility (e.g., "It's my fault they're upset.")

How to Challenge Cognitive Distortions

- **Identify the Distortion:** Recognize the unhelpful thought pattern.
- **Examine the Evidence:** Ask yourself, "What facts support or contradict this thought?"
- **Consider Alternative Views:** Ask, "Is there a more balanced way to see this?"
- **Reframe the Thought:** Replace the distorted thought with a realistic, compassionate one.

Example

- **Distortion:** "I always mess up everything."
- **Alternative Thought:** "I make mistakes sometimes, but I also succeed in many things."