



Unhelpful thinking styles

Combat Stress. Session 2

Black & white thinking



Thinking on a scale where thoughts are either at one extreme end or the other, hence either pure black or pure white, no shades of grey. A tendency to judge yourself or others using general labels. For example, “because I cannot complete this one task I must be a failure in general.” or “that person pulled out in front of me they must be blind.” **Alternative:** *Try to think somewhere in the middle or the ‘grey’ area and develop ‘both-and’ reasoning skills.*

Fortune telling–jumping to conclusions



You see the outcome of a situation before it has had chance to happen and you can see the evidence, often predicting the worst. A tendency to see yourself as a mind reader, predicting what people will say or mean without giving them the chance to respond for themselves. For example, “I didn’t complete that task, they’re going to be angry, so I’ll have to go in there ready to defend myself”. **Alternative:** *Could there be a less awful explanation to explain what has happened.*

Catastrophising



Thinking of small things that go wrong as the end of the world or think only in the worst-case scenarios for events that are coming up. Sometimes called making mountains out of molehills. Assuming that if something goes wrong once that it can never go right again. For example, “They didn’t show up to meet me, they must not care about me anymore!” **Alternative:** *is it really the end of the world? Is this going to be important to me in a years’ time or 10 years’ time?*

Living by fixed rules– or giving yourself unrealistic expectations.



Regularly using phrases such as ‘I should have been able to’ ‘I must be able to’ ‘I ought to have known’ and ‘I can’t do it’. This tends to lead to feelings of guilt and disappointment in yourself when you do not live up to your own unreasonable expectations. **Alternative:** *Try to challenge your own thinking. Try to replace distorted phrases with others such as “I wish”, “I want” and “it would be nice if”.*

Personalising



Taking responsibility or the blame for anything that has gone wrong even if it has little or nothing to do with you. You find that you are always telling yourself “it’s my fault” even though there is little or no evidence to support this. There is a tendency to ignore the roles played by the other people. **Alternative:** *If someone else was in your situation what would you say to them?*

Labelling



Giving people labels when the situation is not that straightforward. A major disadvantage of labelling is that it narrows your thinking and restricts your choices. For example, “Because I have PTSD, I can never fully achieve anything”. By labelling something you may be simplifying something which is actually quite complex. **Alternative:** *The label you choose to give something might not cover everything that is going on*

Negative focus



Assuming that all aspects of the situation are negative. A tendency to see yourself only in terms of your weaknesses and ignoring your strengths. Always looking on the dark side of every situation. Rejecting any positive comments that are given to you as either false or incorrect. **Alternative:** *Try to find a positive even if it is small. Even if the situation had a negative outcome, did you learn something from it?*

Emotional reasoning



Drawing conclusions or making decisions when you are either angry or upset. Because you are in a heightened emotional state you are not likely to be looking at things objectively or be able to see everything that is going on. Your judgement will be clouded by how you are feeling in the moment which may mean you make decisions or jump to conclusions. **Alternative:** *Take a step back, is the best time to make a decision now or can it wait?*

