

UNHELPFUL OR PROBLEMATIC THINKING PATTERNS

Mental Maps, Models and Shortcuts

As humans we create many internal maps and models. They act like shortcuts in the brain that are applied automatically so we can make sense of and respond to things quickly and easily. Often, they form the thinking and underlying beliefs we use to perceive everything.

We develop these mental maps and models based on what we've been taught, exposed to, influenced by and what we've experienced (both positive and negative and the conclusions we drew from the experience). They come from parents, childhood, cultures and religions, education, relationships, organizations we participate in, media and social media exposure, and so forth.



Problematic or Unhelpful Thinking Patterns Descriptions on the following pages were adapted from: Resick, P.A., Monson, C. M. & Chard, K. M. (2024). Cognitive processing therapy. A Comprehensive therapist manual, Second Edition, The Guilford Press.

Clues Thinking May Be Unhelpful- Problematic

We often consider our cognitive "shortcuts" as a given, accurate, and the only or best way of perceiving things. (We may not even realize they are shortcuts). (often without questioning it or realizing
Many shortcuts are helpful.

They can reduce cognitive load, speed up decision-making, and protect us from repeating things that didn't work out.

Shortcuts can also be **problematic or unhelpful**.

Clues a thinking pattern, belief, or mental model may have become a problematic or unhelpful shortcut:

- rigid rather than flexible.
- extreme rather than moderate.
- recurring or sticky.
- seems like the only way of thinking.
- at least partially inaccurate or unrealistic.
- doesn't allow all relevant information or facts to be recognized or considered.

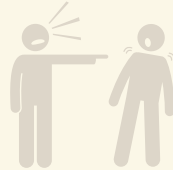


*The listing on the following pages is intended to support noticing patterns in our thinking.
Be Curious. Be Compassionate.*





Always Being Right—When a person engages in this distortion, they are continually putting other people on trial to prove that their own opinions and actions are the absolute correct ones.



Blaming—Externalization of Responsibility—holding others responsible for our feelings and responses.



Catastrophizing—relating to an issue by imagining the worst and expecting the worst to occur.



Control Fallacies—This distortion involves beliefs about being in complete control of every situation in a person's life whether it is feeling externally controlled as though we are a helpless victim or that we have internal control and are responsible for everything and everyone around us.



Emotional Reasoning—rather than basing feelings on facts, the facts are revised in response to feelings and become accepted as true. May involve: exaggeration of real facts; out of context real facts (facts that are manipulated to give a false impression); and non-existent/made up facts.



Fortune Telling/ Predicting the Future—making predictions about the future, often negatively.



Ignoring Important Parts/ Mental Filter—picking out the single or a few negative details and dwelling on it or magnifying it, often to the exclusion of any positive details. (disqualifying the positive)



Jumping to Conclusions/ Overgeneralization—drawing huge conclusions from singular, minor, or rare events; expecting something negative to happen in all situations because of a previous negative experience.



Labelling—eliminating the realities of life with broad, negative terms.



Mind-reading—believing that you know what other people are thinking, intending, or doing.



Magical Thinking—believing one's thoughts, actions or rituals can directly influence one's life or life events despite no plausible connection.



Minimizing and Exaggerating—minimizing own negative behavior and exaggerating the negative behavior of others while exaggerating their own positive behavior and minimizing those of others. People can also do the reverse, when they minimize their own positive behavior or attributes and exaggerate those of others.



Oversimplifying—perceiving or presenting something as simple when there is much more complexity involved.



Personalization—taking things personally that are in fact unrelated or in fact have nothing to do with you.



Projection—projecting one's internal problems onto others, accusing others of their misbehaviours. Seeing in others that which is going on inside the self or that which the self is doing.



Polarized Thinking (Black and White Thinking)—seeing things as all or nothing, with no middle ground. People or situations are thought of in “either/or” categories, with no shades of gray or allowing for the complexity of most people and most situations.



Rationalizing—an attempt to explain or justify (behavior or attitudes of self or others) with logical, plausible reasons, even if these are not true or appropriate.



Shoulds—living by a set of ironclad rules that are unachievable and illogical.



Unrealistic Hope—maintaining positive desire and expectation about a situation while disregarding the significant difficulties involved.



Victim Mentality—considering or perceiving oneself as the victim rather than recognizing and taking responsibility for one’s contribution and one’s self in any given situation.