



JENNIFER BALLERINI, PSY.D

Helping People Build Better Relationships

## COMMON NEGATIVE THINKING PATTERNS

**All or Nothing Thinking.** Looking at things in absolute, black-or-white categories. If a situation falls short of perfect, you see it as a total failure.

- “I’ve completely blown my diet—that one scoop of ice cream ruined everything.”
- “My coworker made a mistake on this project. I can’t trust her to do anything right now.”

**Overgeneralization.** Viewing a negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat by using words such as “always” or “never” when you think about it.

- “I never get the girl.”
- “I always get passed over for a raise.”

**Mental Filter.** Picking out and magnifying a single negative detail and dwelling on it exclusively so that your vision of all reality becomes darkened, like a drop of ink in a glass of water.

- Obsessing over the mildly critical feedback of one colleague after a presentation.

**Discounting the Positives.** Diminishing your pride and joy in your accomplishments or positive qualities by insisting that they “don’t count,” making yourself feel inadequate, unhappy, and unrewarded.

- “I did OK, but I could’ve done better.”
- “Anyone could’ve done that.”
- “She only said that to make me feel better. She was just being polite.”

**Mind Reading.** Arbitrarily assuming that someone is reacting negatively to you when there’s no definite evidence for that.

- “The boss sure looks mad—I must be in trouble.”

**Fortune Telling.** Predicting things will turn out badly, thus psyching yourself out and robbing yourself of hope, optimism, and confidence.

- “I’m going to flunk this test.”
- “I’m never going to get better.”

**Emotional Reasoning.** Assuming that your negative emotions reflect the way things really are.

- “I feel terrified about getting on a plane. It must be very dangerous to fly.”
- “I feel guilty. I must really be a rotten person.”
- “I feel angry. This means I’ve been treated unfairly.”
- “I feel hopeless, so I must be hopeless.”
- “I don’t feel like doing this, so that must mean it’s OK to put it off.”

**Should Statements.** Criticizing yourself or other people for things that SHOULD be the way you

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expected them to be. Musts, oughts, and have tos are similar offenders.

- “I ought to go help my mom with her taxes.”
- “I should go to the gym tonight.”

**Labeling.** Identifying with your shortcomings and calling yourself names.

- Instead of saying, “I made a mistake,” you tell yourself, “I’m a jerk.”
- “He is such a loser.”

**Personalization and Blame.** Blaming yourself for something you weren’t entirely responsible for or blaming other people and overlooking ways that your own attitudes and behaviors might contribute to a problem.

- “My child is struggling at school. This shows what a bad mother I am.”
- “If I were a better friend, she wouldn’t ignore me.”
- “My marriage is lousy because of my partner.”

**Catastrophizing.** Expecting the worst possible outcome and/or exaggerating the importance of insignificant failures or stressors, seeing everything as “the end of the world.”

“I messed up part of my presentation today—I’m going to get fired for sure.”

“I tripped at school today—I know everyone was looking at me.”

“My daughter got sick—she might die.”

**Wishful Thinking.** Supposing things would be better if they were different.

“If only I had married so-and-so, then...”

“If I were thinner, then...”

“If I had moved to New York, then...”

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