

Cognitive Distortions

001

All-or-nothing thinking

Viewing situations in black-and-white terms where anything short of perfection is seen as total failure, overlooking middle ground or partial successes.

EXAMPLES

- “ If I don't do this perfectly, then I'm a complete failure.
- “ If I can't be the best at it, there's no point in trying at all.
- “ Either I succeed entirely, or this will have been a waste of time.

COUNTER THOUGHTS

- Even if this isn't perfect, it's still a valuable effort.
- Progress counts, even if it's small steps.
- Life has shades of grey; it's okay to do well without being flawless.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

When you catch yourself thinking in extremes, pause and look for middle-ground options. Remind yourself that partial success is still progress. Focus on what was accomplished and set realistic goals for the next step.

002

Overgeneralising

Making broad conclusions based on a single incident, assuming a setback predicts future outcomes and seeing isolated events as reflective of overall patterns.

EXAMPLES

- “ I messed up this project, so I'm probably not good at my job at all.
- “ One bad date means I'll be single forever.
- “ I always make mistakes; I can't do anything right.

COUNTER THOUGHTS

- One experience doesn't define everything.
- This is a unique situation, and the next time could be different.
- I can learn from this instead of assuming it'll always happen.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

When a negative event occurs, notice if you're making it a blanket statement about your entire life. Remind yourself that one instance doesn't define the whole picture.

003

Filtering

Focusing only on negative details while ignoring positive aspects. Like wearing a lens that only allows flaws or failures to be seen.

EXAMPLES

- “ I got lots of compliments, but all I can think about is the one piece of criticism.
- “ I only remember the times I failed, not when I succeeded.
- “ I forget the positives because the negatives are just too overwhelming.

COUNTER THOUGHTS

- I may be focusing only on the negatives; let's look for positives too.
- What went well in this situation?
- There's more to this than just the challenging parts.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Practice balanced reflection by listing both positives and negatives. Aim to give equal attention to each, even if the positives feel small.

004

Catastrophising

Imagining the worst possible outcome in any situation, even when unlikely. This intensifies feelings of fear and anxiety.

EXAMPLES

- “ If I make a mistake, I'll lose my job and never find work again.
- “ If this relationship doesn't work out, I'll end up alone forever.
- “ If I get a bad grade on this test, my entire future is ruined.

COUNTER THOUGHTS

- What are the realistic odds of the worst-case scenario happening?
- Even if things go wrong, I can handle the outcome.
- Let's focus on what's in my control instead of imagining extremes.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Write down the worst-case scenario you fear, then list the likelihood and evidence for it. Create a more moderate scenario and imagine how you could handle it.

005

Mind-reading

Assuming you know what others are thinking, often that they're judging or criticising you. This fuels social anxiety and insecurity.

EXAMPLES

- “ They didn't reply to my message; they must be mad at me.
- “ Everyone probably thinks I'm incompetent after that presentation.
- “ They smiled at me, but they're probably just being polite.

COUNTER THOUGHTS

- I can't actually know what others think unless they tell me.
- They might be focused on their own concerns, not judging me.
- Assuming others are critical doesn't make it true.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Remind yourself that you can't know what others think without clear evidence. Seek clarity by asking open questions or reframing the thought.

006

Fortune-telling

Believing you can predict how things will turn out, usually expecting negative outcomes. Often leads to self-fulfilling prophecies through avoidance.

EXAMPLES

- “ There's no way this interview will go well. I just know it.
- “ I'll fail the test, so there's no point in studying.
- “ I'm going to embarrass myself at the meeting, I can feel it.

COUNTER THOUGHTS

- I can't predict the future, so I'll stay open to possibilities.
- Just because I fear a bad outcome doesn't mean it will happen.
- Let's see how things actually unfold before deciding.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Whenever you predict a negative outcome, remind yourself that the future is uncertain. Challenge your predictions by setting small, realistic goals and observing how things actually unfold.

007

Discounting the positive

Downplaying or dismissing achievements or positive feedback, making any success feel unearned or insignificant.

EXAMPLES

- “ Anyone could have done what I did; it's not really an achievement.
- “ Sure, I did well this time, but it doesn't mean I'm actually good at it.
- “ They said I did a great job, but they were probably just being nice.

COUNTER THOUGHTS

- My successes and strengths deserve recognition.
- If others can see value in this, I can try to see it too.
- Each positive step is a building block, even if it feels small.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

List small successes or positives daily, no matter how minor. Challenge your tendency to downplay them by celebrating achievements with a friend or loved one.

008

Labelling

Assigning negative labels to yourself or others based on isolated actions, turning behaviours into permanent traits and impacting self-esteem.

EXAMPLES

- “ I made a mistake, so I'm just an idiot.
- “ I didn't complete the task, so I'm a lazy person.
- “ I failed at that project; I'm such a loser.

COUNTER THOUGHTS

- One mistake doesn't define my entire character.
- I am more than any single moment or outcome.
- Labels limit me; I am a complex person with many qualities.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Replace negative labels with accurate descriptions of specific behaviours. Remind yourself that actions don't define identity. Use compassionate self-talk, focusing on growth rather than judgment.

009

Should statements

Rigidly insisting on how things should be, leading to disappointment or guilt when reality doesn't match expectations.

EXAMPLES

- “ I should be able to handle this without any trouble.
- “ I shouldn't have to ask for help; I should know this already.
- “ I should be further along in my career by now.

COUNTER THOUGHTS

- It's okay to have flexible expectations.
- There's no one 'right' way to do things.
- I'll focus on what's helpful rather than what I think I 'should' do.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Catch yourself when you say 'should' and replace it with 'could' to open up more flexible options. Focus on actions that are helpful and align with your goals.

010

Emotional reasoning

Assuming that emotions reflect objective truth, like believing something is hopeless simply because it feels that way.

EXAMPLES

- “ I feel so anxious; this must mean I'm in danger.
- “ I feel inadequate, so I must be inadequate.
- “ I'm nervous about this; that probably means I'm not ready.

COUNTER THOUGHTS

- Just because I feel this way doesn't make it true.
- My emotions are valid, but they don't define reality.
- Let's look at the facts as well as my feelings.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

When strong emotions arise, take a step back and examine the thoughts fuelling them. Balance emotions with rational thinking by asking, 'What are the facts in this situation?'

011

Personalisation

Taking responsibility for events out of your control or blaming yourself for others' problems. Often results in guilt or shame.

EXAMPLES

- “ They looked upset — it must be because of something I did.
- “ My team didn't succeed, and it's all my fault.
- “ My friend didn't text back, so I must have done something wrong.

COUNTER THOUGHTS

- Not everything is within my control, and that's okay.
- Others' actions aren't always about me.
- I'll focus on what I can change and accept what I can't.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Separate what's in your control from what isn't. Ask whether there's real evidence that the situation is personal. Focus on your responses rather than taking on blame.

012

Magnifying or minimising

Exaggerating the importance of problems or downplaying positive traits and accomplishments. Distorts reality, often creating unnecessary stress.

EXAMPLES

- “ One mistake will ruin everything I've worked for.
- “ I got a high grade, but it doesn't really matter.
- “ Everyone else's accomplishments are huge; mine are tiny in comparison.

COUNTER THOUGHTS

- Let's view the situation as it really is, not just the extremes.
- It's okay to acknowledge positive aspects without downplaying them.
- Problems don't need to be inflated to seem important.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

When magnifying a problem, step back and reassess its actual impact. When minimising positives, remind yourself that acknowledging strengths doesn't equate to arrogance.

013

Comparing

Constantly measuring yourself against others and feeling inferior. Can lead to envy and dissatisfaction with one's own life.

EXAMPLES

- “ They're so much more successful than I am; I'll never catch up.
- “ Their life seems perfect, while mine is a mess.
- “ Everyone else seems to handle challenges better than I do.

COUNTER THOUGHTS

- Everyone has their own journey, and so do I.
- I don't need to measure my worth against others.
- Comparing won't change my situation; focusing on myself can.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Limit time on activities that trigger comparison. Focus on personal goals that align with your values. Remind yourself that your worth is independent of others' achievements.

014

Blaming

Shifting responsibility for your own emotions or outcomes onto others rather than taking accountability. Prevents personal growth and resolution.

EXAMPLES

- “ If it weren't for them, I'd be so much happier.
- “ My boss is the reason I can't enjoy my work.
- “ I wouldn't have failed if they had helped me.

COUNTER THOUGHTS

- What role can I play in improving things?
- I'll focus on solutions rather than assigning blame.
- I can't control others, but I can control my response.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Evaluate your own contributions and choices. Practice constructive problem-solving rather than focusing on who is at fault. Shift your mindset to 'What can I do next?'

015

Self-doubt

Constantly questioning your abilities or decisions and assuming inadequacy. Holds you back from pursuing goals or taking risks.

EXAMPLES

- “ I don't think I'm smart enough to succeed here.
- “ What if I'm not really qualified for this role?
- “ I doubt I'll be able to manage this task.

COUNTER THOUGHTS

- I've handled challenges before; I can handle this too.
- My skills and decisions deserve respect.
- Doubting myself doesn't make it true.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Write down evidence of your past accomplishments and revisit this list when self-doubt arises. Set small, achievable goals to build confidence gradually.

016

Pessimism

Expecting the worst in every situation and believing negative outcomes are likely. Often leads to hopelessness and inaction.

EXAMPLES

- “ This probably won't work out, so why even try?
- “ There's no way I can succeed at this.
- “ Things always seem to go wrong for me.

COUNTER THOUGHTS

- Not everything will turn out badly; good outcomes are possible.
- I'll stay open to positive outcomes, too.
- Let's wait for the actual outcome instead of assuming the worst.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Challenge pessimistic thoughts by identifying any realistic positive outcomes. Practice gratitude by noting one positive thing each day, however small.

017

Jumping to conclusions

Making quick, usually negative assumptions without evidence. Drives impulsive decisions and prevents open-mindedness.

EXAMPLES

- “ They probably think I'm not good enough.
- “ This is going to end badly; I can just tell.
- “ I know they're annoyed with me, even if they haven't said it.

COUNTER THOUGHTS

- I don't have all the facts yet, so I'll hold off on assumptions.
- I'll ask questions rather than make quick judgments.
- Let's see things more clearly before drawing conclusions.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

When you feel yourself making assumptions, pause and look for actual evidence. Practice curiosity by asking open questions. Approach situations with an open mind.

018

Unrealistic expectations

Holding yourself or others to unattainable standards, leading to chronic dissatisfaction. Fuels feelings of failure and frustration.

EXAMPLES

- “ I should be able to finish all of this work perfectly and on time.
- “ I can't believe I didn't do this flawlessly.
- “ I expect myself to know how to handle everything on my own.

COUNTER THOUGHTS

- It's okay to have goals that are achievable, not just perfect.
- Progress matters more than rigid standards.
- I'll be kind to myself and allow room for growth.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Break down large goals into smaller, achievable steps and celebrate each milestone. Adjust expectations to reflect realistic goals aligned with your well-being and growth.

019

Assuming the worst

Believing the worst-case scenario is the most probable outcome in any situation. Breeds anxiety and hesitation.

EXAMPLES

- “ This probably means they're going to break up with me.
- “ I'm sure I won't get that promotion.
- “ I'll probably fail this test no matter how much I study.

COUNTER THOUGHTS

- The worst case is just one of many possibilities.
- I'll focus on staying prepared, not assuming negativity.
- Expecting the worst doesn't help; I'll focus on what I can do.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Pause when a negative assumption arises and challenge yourself to think of a neutral or positive possibility. Focus on proactive steps rather than waiting for the worst.

020

Feeling hopeless

Believing that things will never improve, leading to resignation and lack of motivation. This thought pattern can spiral into depression.

EXAMPLES

- “ Things will never get better for me.
- “ No matter what I do, nothing seems to change.
- “ I'm stuck, and there's no way out.

COUNTER THOUGHTS

- Even small actions can help me feel more hopeful.
- This feeling is temporary and doesn't define my future.
- I'll look for reasons to be hopeful, even in small things.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Take small steps to create positive change in your environment. Set realistic goals that give a sense of purpose. Surround yourself with supportive people who reinforce a hopeful perspective.

021

Perfectionism

Setting impossibly high standards and feeling like a failure if they're not met. Leads to constant pressure and dissatisfaction, even with accomplishments.

EXAMPLES

- “ If it's not perfect, then it's a failure.
- “ I can't let anyone see this unless it's flawless.
- “ Mistakes aren't acceptable under any circumstances.

COUNTER THOUGHTS

- Done is better than perfect; I can be proud of my effort.
- I'll celebrate progress, not just perfection.
- It's okay to make mistakes; they're part of learning.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Practice self-compassion by accepting that mistakes are part of learning and growth. Set realistic, flexible goals that emphasise progress rather than perfection.

022

Disqualifying achievements

Finding ways to undermine or invalidate your own accomplishments, feeling they don't count. Erodes confidence and keeps you feeling inadequate.

EXAMPLES

- “ That was just luck; it wasn't really because of my skills.
- “ Sure, I did well, but it wasn't that hard anyway.
- “ Anyone could have done what I did.

COUNTER THOUGHTS

- My achievements are real and deserve acknowledgment.
- I worked hard for this, and it's okay to feel proud.
- Celebrating successes doesn't make me arrogant.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Keep a journal of achievements, big or small, and revisit it regularly. Share accomplishments with trusted people who can provide a balanced perspective.

023

Fear of failure

Avoiding new experiences or challenges due to an overwhelming fear of not succeeding. Prevents personal growth and opportunities.

EXAMPLES

- “ I can't take that risk because I might fail.
- “ If I fail, everyone will look down on me.
- “ Trying something new just sets me up for failure.

COUNTER THOUGHTS

- Every effort is a chance to grow, not just succeed or fail.
- I can learn from any outcome, even if it's not ideal.
- Taking risks is a part of progress, even if there's a chance of failure.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Challenge the fear by setting small, manageable goals that allow for gradual risk-taking. Shift your focus from outcomes to the value of the experience itself.

024

Ruminating

Repeatedly dwelling on negative thoughts or past events that can't be changed. Amplifies distress and keeps you stuck in a cycle of worry.

EXAMPLES

- “ I keep going over that mistake in my mind, and I can't stop.
- “ I keep replaying that embarrassing moment over and over.
- “ I can't stop thinking about what I should have done differently.

COUNTER THOUGHTS

- I can't change the past, but I can focus on the present.
- Let's focus on solutions instead of reliving the problem.
- I'll set a time limit for reflecting, then shift my focus.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Set a specific worry time each day, then redirect your focus afterward. Practice grounding exercises or mindfulness to help stay present.

025

Victim mentality

Believing you're powerless and that bad things will always happen to you. This mindset limits agency and reinforces feelings of helplessness.

EXAMPLES

- “ Nothing good ever happens to me.
- “ Other people have it so much easier than I do.
- “ Everything bad seems to happen to me.

COUNTER THOUGHTS

- I have the power to make changes in my life.
- Challenges can be opportunities to grow.
- I'll focus on what I can control rather than feeling powerless.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Focus on what aspects of the situation you can control, no matter how small. Set small, empowering goals to gradually regain a sense of agency.

026

Fear of rejection

Expecting others to reject or disapprove of you, leading to social withdrawal or people-pleasing. This fear limits genuine connections and authenticity.

EXAMPLES

- “ I don't want to ask because they'll probably say no.
- “ They're not going to want to be friends with me.
- “ If I open up, they'll just reject me.

COUNTER THOUGHTS

- Not everyone will accept me, and that's okay.
- I don't need everyone's approval to feel valued.
- Rejection is a normal part of life; it doesn't define me.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Remind yourself that rejection is a normal part of life and doesn't define your worth. Practice self-acceptance to reduce the need for external validation.

027

Imposter syndrome

Feeling like a fraud despite achievements, fearing exposure as incompetent. Leads to constant anxiety and undervaluing one's skills.

EXAMPLES

- “ I don't deserve this success; they'll find out I'm a fraud.
- “ Everyone else is so much better than me.
- “ I'm not as competent as people think I am.

COUNTER THOUGHTS

- My achievements are real, even if they feel unfamiliar.
- I deserve to be here, just as much as anyone else.
- I'll trust that others see my value as well.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Keep a record of positive feedback and achievements to review when feeling like an imposter. Acknowledge that self-doubt is common, even among high achievers.

028

Selective attention to negatives

Only noticing flaws or setbacks even when surrounded by positive feedback or events. Creates a distorted, negatively-skewed view of reality.

EXAMPLES

- “ I only notice the things I messed up.
- “ I focus only on the areas where I need improvement, not where I did well.
- “ The negative parts of my day stand out more than the positive ones.

COUNTER THOUGHTS

- There are positive aspects I can focus on, too.
- Let's look for a balanced view of the situation.
- Even if there are negatives, I can appreciate the positives.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Intentionally look for positives and write them down daily. Practice gratitude by noting things you appreciate each day, even minor ones.