

# MINDBRIDGE

## Cognitive Distortions and Disputation

### What are Cognitive Distortions?

- Cognitive distortions are biased or irrational thought patterns that negatively influence how we perceive ourselves, others, and the world.
- These distortions often reinforce negative emotions and can contribute to mental health issues like anxiety and depression.
- They are automatic, deeply ingrained, and often unconscious, but we CAN identify and challenge them!
- Examples:
  - All or Nothing Thinking: If I am not always making my parents happy, I am a total failure.
  - Disqualifying the Positive: They only said I did well because they were being nice



## **Exercise #1: Identifying your own Cognitive Distortions**

- On your own worksheet, check off the Cognitive Distortions that you resonate with
- Then, at the bottom of the page, write a example sentence of a specific cognitive distortion you hold

- ☐ All-or-Nothing Thinking (Black-and-White Thinking): Seeing things in extreme terms, with no middle ground or gray area. For example, "If I don't get a perfect score, I'm a total failure".
- ☐ Overgeneralization: Taking a single negative event and seeing it as a pattern of defeat or failure in all areas of life. For example, "I didn't get invited to this party. I'm always left out of everything".
- ☐ Mental Filtering (Negative Filter): Focusing only on the negative aspects of a situation and ignoring any positive feedback.
- ☐ Disqualifying the Positive: Dismissing or downplaying positive experiences, achievements, or qualities. For example, "Sure, I got an A on this project, but that was just luck. I'm not actually smart".
- ☐ Mind Reading: Assuming you know what others are thinking or feeling without any evidence to support your assumption. For example, "She didn't smile at me; she must think I'm annoying".
- ☐ Fortune-Telling (Predicting the Future): Predicting negative outcomes without considering other possibilities or acknowledging past successes. For example, "I know I'm going to fail this interview. I always mess things up".
- ☐ Magnification (Catastrophizing): Blowing things out of proportion and making events a bigger deal than they actually are. For example, "If I don't get this job, my entire life will be ruined".

- ☐ Emotional Reasoning: Believing that because you feel something, it must be true, even when there's no evidence other than the feeling. For example, "I feel stupid, therefore I must be stupid".
- ☐ Labeling: Putting a negative label on yourself or others based on specific actions or outcomes. For example, "I fell down trying to score that goal in soccer today. I'm a horrible klutz".
- ☐ Personalization: Taking things personally and assuming that people always think about their actions and decisions. For example, "My friends are playing together without me; they must not like me".
- ☐ Minimizing: Downplaying the significance of positive events or achievements. For example, "I just got lucky on that test. I'm not that good at math".
- ☐ Should Statements: Thinking about what you "should" or "must" do, leading to disappointment and frustration when these expectations are not met. For example, "I should always be perfect"

**Example of a Cognitive Distortion I have:**

**Exercise #2: Accepting a Thought, and Creating Cognitive Distance**  
What is the Acceptance of Thoughts vs. the Defusion of Thoughts?

**1. Acceptance of Thoughts**

- Definition: Acceptance involves acknowledging thoughts and feelings for what they are without overanalyzing, resisting, judging, or criticizing them. It does not mean approving of or liking the thought or feeling.
- Purpose: It aims to reduce the struggle with unwanted thoughts and feelings, allowing individuals to experience them without resistance or avoidance.
- Process: Acceptance encourages a willingness to sit with uncomfortable emotions and thoughts while focusing on meaningful aspects of life.
- Impact: By accepting thoughts, individuals can prevent the cumulative effect of distress, which often amplifies negative emotions and makes problems feel overwhelming.

**2. Defusion of Thoughts**

- Definition: Defusion refers to disentangling or unhooking from the literal meaning of thoughts. It helps loosen the grip of thoughts that are treated as reality or identity.
- Purpose: The goal is to create psychological distance from thoughts so individuals can see them as separate from themselves rather than being consumed by their meaning.
- Process: Techniques involve observing thoughts without attaching emotional weight, recognizing them as mere mental events rather than truths.

a) For example, a thought like "I am stupid" is reframed as just a thought rather than a defining characteristic of oneself.

- Impact: Defusion reduces the emotional charge of distressing thoughts by breaking the automatic association between verbal processes and direct experiences. Language plays a key role in this process, as changing how thoughts are expressed (e.g., translating them into another language) can reduce their emotional impact

### **Acceptance of Thought and Distance with the thought:**

- On the left column, write three separate fears and assumptions that you hold
- on the right column, rewrite all three fears and assumptions from a absolute judgement to a personal fact.

<u>Thought:</u> “I am...” “I will always be...” “Would if...”	<u>Defusion of Thought:</u> “I feel like...” “I am experiencing a thought that..”

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## What is Cognitive Disputation?

- Cognitive disputation is a technique that involves **actively challenging and questioning** irrational or harmful thoughts. The goal is to replace distorted thinking with more **balanced and realistic perspectives**. This process helps individuals critically evaluate their thoughts and beliefs, improving emotional regulation and decision-making.
- Key aspects of cognitive disputation include:

a) Questioning Validity: Asking whether a thought is based on evidence or assumptions (e.g., "What evidence supports this thought? What evidence contradicts it?").

b) Exploring Alternatives: Considering other ways of interpreting the situation (e.g., "What would someone else think about this?").

c) Assessing Realism: Evaluating how realistic or likely the thought is (e.g., "Is this thought always true, or am I exaggerating?").

### Exercise #3: Putting our Thoughts on Trial



- In this exercise you will test the evidence FOR and AGAINST your thoughts
- Your evidence has to be presented in logical or factual terms

#### Steps:

- Give a summary of the circumstances that gave rise to the unfavorable or upsetting thought.
- The facts in the "Prosecution" box lend credence to the negative interpretation.
- The response from the "Defence" box is interpreted favorably.
- The final "Judgement" provides a fair, balanced, and justified summary, while the "Witness" box provides an impartial and objective viewpoint.

#### EXAMPLE:

##### 1. The Situation / Trigger

You were assigned a presentation at school, but during the presentation, you stumbled over your words and forgot one of your key points. This led to a distressing thought: "I'm terrible at public speaking, and everyone thinks I'm incompetent."

## **2. The Prosecution (Negative Interpretation)**

- Facts supporting the negative interpretation:

- a) You forgot an important point during the presentation.
- b) You noticed some colleagues looking confused or disengaged.
- c) You felt nervous and stumbled over your words, which might have made you appear unprepared.

## **3. The Defense (Positive Interpretation)**

- Facts supporting a positive interpretation:

You successfully delivered most of the presentation and covered key information.

Some colleagues gave positive feedback afterward, praising your effort.

Nervousness is common during presentations, and forgetting one point doesn't define your overall performance.

## **4. The Neutral Witness**

- What would an independent observer say?

An objective observer might say: "You handled the presentation reasonably well despite a minor mistake. Most people in the room probably understood the main points and appreciated your effort. Everyone makes mistakes occasionally, especially in high-pressure situations."

## **5. The Balanced Judgement**

Balanced, realistic interpretation:



"I did a decent job on the presentation overall, even though I forgot one point and stumbled slightly. These issues don't mean I'm incompetent; they show I'm human. I can learn from this experience to improve my public speaking skills in future presentations."

### Your Turn:

The Situation / Trigger What happened or triggered the problem?	The Prosecution What facts support a negative interpretation?	The Defence What facts support a positive interpretation?	The Neutral Witness What would an independent observer say?

The Balanced Judgement – Having assessed the evidence, what is a balanced, realistic and fair interpretation?
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