

Intro: You are listening to Supporting Supporters, a ChangetoChill podcast. This is a free mental well-being resource offered by Allina Health. My name is Tonya Freeman. I'm a licensed psychologist and regional lead psychologist with Allina Health.

These podcast episodes are aimed with the goal of providing quick, tangible resources and information from Allina Health mental health providers on a range of mental health topics relevant to day to day lives of the listener. We invite you to join us in any way you please, whether you sit back and kick your feet up, or as you engage in movement, your daily commute, or as you prepare for your day. However you choose to join us, we welcome you and we honor your time.

Episode: My name is Sarah Paper and I'm a Licensed Psychologist with Allina Health. I work primarily with children and adolescents, in addition to a few adults. Today I am going to be talking with you about recognizing unhelpful thoughts. At times it may feel as if your mood is not in your control. Our thoughts often hold the answer and the solution to gaining control and shifting our emotions from uncomfortable to more comfortable.

Lets go over some very common cognitive errors that are addressed in cognitive behavioral therapy, along with my favorite, rational emotive behavior therapy.

All right lets get started

The first one were going to talk about is all-or-nothing thinking, or dichotomous thinking, or black and white thinking. That's where we get stuck in those patterns of thinking things are all good or all bad. This line of thinking can lead to uncomfortable feelings, low self-esteem, shame. There is this idea that if things aren't perfect or 100% then its not good enough and worthless, which will lead you to believe your not good enough and your worthless. Your also missing out on the positive information and experiences that occur in each interaction that we have, and each task we complete.

The next cognitive error you may find yourself participating in is overgeneralization. This happens when you make a rule after a single event or a series of coincidences. The words "always" or "never" frequently appear in the sentence. Because you have experience with one event playing out a certain way, you assume that all future events will have the same outcome. These are examples of overgeneralizing in statements, "Shes always doing things like that to make me look bad" or "nobody seems to know what their doing around here", "Your never ready on time so we're always late for everything" , "Everybody is always asking me to do them a favor". A mental filter is the opposite of overgeneralization, but with the same negative outcome. Instead of taking one small event and generalizing it inappropriately, the mental filter takes one small event and focuses on it exclusively, filtering out anything else.

You may also find yourself at times, discounting the positives, another cognitive distortion. This involves ignoring or invalidating good things that have happened to you. It is similar to mental filtering, but instead of simply ignoring the positives, you are actively rejecting them. If you think about people who say things like "Oh, see I knew it, that person doesn't like me" or " I knew this wasn't going to be good" from one little tiny moment, as if everything else positive was fake.

Jumping to conclusions is another common cognitive error.

There are a few ways of jumping to conclusions:

- **Mind reading:** When you think someone is going to react in a particular way, or you believe someone is thinking things that they aren't

- **Fortune telling:** When you predict events will unfold in a particular way, often to avoid trying something difficult or challenging
- **Catastrophizing** you jump to the worst possible conclusion in every scenario, no matter how improbable it is.

In rational emotive behavior therapy, sometimes we use catastrophizing to our advantage. Having people imagine the worst scenario, and then also recognizing how that would be extremely difficult, very uncomfortable, and that they would be able to survive it and get through it. This means you don't have to avoid these things to prevent them from happening, but rather recognize our own strengths and resilience's.

Magnification is a cognitive distortion that includes exaggerating the importance of shortcomings and problems while minimizing the importance of desirable qualities. Similar to mental filtering and discounting the positive, this cognitive distortion involves magnifying your negative qualities while minimizing your positive ones. For an example, people who tend to procrastinate might say "I'm a terrible employee because I tend to procrastinate sometimes". Another example is if I forgot someone's birthday I may conclude I am a terrible friend. That would be ignoring or minimizing all of the positive qualities I have as a friend and all of the nice things I have done.

The next cognitive distortion is emotional reasoning. This is a way of judging yourself or your circumstances based on your emotions. This type of reasoning assumes that because you are experiencing a negative emotion, it must be an accurate reflection of reality. An example would be "If I am feeling anxious, the feeling must be scary" or "I feel guilty, so I must have done something bad", "I'm feeling inadequate so I must be worthless"

The next cognitive distortion we're going to talk about is "Should statements". In rational emotive behavior therapy, Albert Ellis (the founder) would talk about "shoulding all over yourself". With that in mind "Should statements" involve always thinking about things that you think you "should" or "must" do. These types of statements can make you feel worried or anxious, inadequate, depressed. An example might be "I should be able to get all of this work done tonight" or "I should be able to remember my friend's birthday". To shift that line of thinking is to question "Should I?" and maybe shift the self talk you are doing and say "I wish I were able to do this" or "I want to be able to do this" and this is really hard but "I might not be able to". I would also like to add that sometimes people use these "should statements" against other people too. People may say things like "You should be able to understand this" or "You should be able to get this all done". That is putting shame onto other people and we don't know that, or have all the information. It is an unfair statement that lacks compassion and empathy.

Labeling is a cognitive distortion that involves making a judgment about yourself or someone else as a person, rather than seeing the behavior as something the person did that doesn't define them as an individual. I think we can all think of some good examples there. If you think about it, it can follow the "should" statements too. If you think "This person should be able to do this" then we may label them judgmentally because their struggling.

We might also label ourselves because we are struggling, or because we are not meeting those “should” expectations we place on ourselves or others.

The next cognitive distortion we will talk about is personalization and blame. This distortion whereby you entirely blame yourself, or someone else, for a situation that in reality involved many factors that were out of your control. This can also include inaccurately assuming that you have been intentionally excluded or targeted. Personalization and blame can lead to heightened anxiety and depression in individuals.

Going over these cognitive distortions, what they might look like, helps us to recognize when we are engaging in them. Awareness is the first step towards feeling better. Catching yourself forces you to think of things differently. One thing I tell patients is that I want them to think of at least 2-3 other explanations for something, even if its creative and unrealistic it is important to do that. Sometimes we jump to the first conclusion based on patterns that have developed and aren't helpful. An example I was taught was “Pretend you walk into a room and people start laughing. If you think their laughing at you because your outfit or because they don't like you, your mood is going to be very uncomfortable. Your young to feel sad maybe even angry. Instead you could think maybe someone told a joke, maybe they spit out their food or farted. When you think those things you don't feel anything. You don't feel upset, its not about you”. See how that awareness can shift your mood. Its important to pay attention to that and these things. If you find yourself participating in these cognitive distortions, pay attention and see how you can shift it. Notice how you can think differently and feel differently.

I hope you found this podcast helpful. Thank you for taking time out of your day to listen. Thank you for everything you do. I really appreciate you all.

Outro: On behalf of Allina Health and Change to Chill, we thank you for taking the time to listen to our podcast. We do hope you enjoyed this episode and we hope that you join us in other episodes covering even more interesting topics with mental health providers. As always, you can find the show notes and any accompanying research and tools at the change to chill website at www.changetochill.org. In health and wellness, take care and see you next time!