

Cognitive Distortions

Cheat Sheet



The ten thinking traps that make anxiety louder. Catching one in the act is half the work of letting it go.

1 SPOT THE PATTERN

2 NAME WHICH DISTORTION

3 ASK WHAT THE EVIDENCE SAYS

1 All-or-Nothing Thinking

Everything is a total win or a complete failure. The middle ground stops existing.

"I ate one cookie, so the whole diet is ruined."

2 Catastrophizing

One small problem snowballs straight to the worst possible ending.

"My heart is racing. What if something is seriously wrong with me?"

3 Mind Reading

Deciding you know exactly what someone thinks of you, with zero proof.

"She didn't wave back. She's clearly annoyed with me."

4 Fortune Telling

Predicting things will go badly, then treating the prediction as a fact.

"There's no point applying. I already know I won't get it."

5 Overgeneralization

One bad moment becomes a permanent rule about you or your whole life.

"That date went badly. I'm always going to be alone."

6 Mental Filter

Zooming in on the one negative detail until it is all you can see.

"Ninety-nine nice comments, one critical one - and that's the one I replay."

7 Discounting the Positive

Good things somehow never count: it was luck, politeness, or a fluke.

"They only said my work was good to be nice."

8 Emotional Reasoning

Treating a feeling as if it were evidence about how things really are.

"I feel like a burden, so I must actually be one."

9 Should Statements

Rigid rules about how you or others must act, with guilt as the late fee.

"I should be over this by now. What's wrong with me?"

10 Personalization

Taking the blame for outcomes that were never yours to control.

"The party felt awkward. It must have been my fault."



THE ONE-QUESTION FIX

"Would this thought hold up in court?"

Put the thought on the stand: what is the actual evidence for it, and what is the evidence against? Distorted thoughts sound convincing but travel light - they rarely bring proof. If a fair jury wouldn't convict on this evidence, you don't have to serve the sentence.