

Common Errors in Thinking

Mindfulness Worksheet

Date / Time:

What have you brought mindful awareness to today? Check all that apply.

☐

Heart

☐

Mind

☐

Body

☐

Breath

☐

Environment

To begin this Meditation, please bring kind awareness to

- why you chose this topic
- how your belly, chest, and head each feel when you reflect on this topic
- the emotions that you can associate with these visceral feelings
- the positive or negative impact of any stories you believe in regarding this topic
- the fact that many others are feeling similarly about this topic as you
- how you might feel with increased awareness around this topic
- when you can apply increased mindfulness to this topic in your day-to-day life



PURPOSE / EFFECTS:

When we are feeling down, it can be helpful to remember that bad moods often trigger errors in our thinking that make our thoughts overly negative and inaccurate. Learning these common errors in thinking can help us recognize when our thoughts are untrue.

It also encourages us not to automatically believe our thoughts. When we are in a low mood, we can identify which errors in thinking are present and then more effectively challenge our thoughts.

METHOD:

Summary

Below is a list of common errors in thinking and some examples. After familiarizing yourself with these errors, practice recognizing them in your thoughts.

Long Version

Common Errors in Thinking:

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All-or-nothing thinking

- Viewing things in black or white. If something is not perfect, we think of it as a failure or waste of time.
- EXAMPLE: If someone misses one problem on a test, he or she equates that with failing.

Mental filter

- Picking out and dwelling on a single negative event or aspect and focusing solely on it, while ignoring the whole picture. Applying a mental filter is similar to “tunnel vision,” where someone only focuses on and sees the negative parts of a situation.
- EXAMPLE: If someone receives feedback about his or her work that is very positive, except for one criticism, he or she only focuses on the critical remark.

Discounting the positive

- Rejecting all positive aspects of an experience and generating reasons why they don't count or are not important.
- EXAMPLE: “I got just lucky,” or “Anyone could have done what I did.”

Emotional reasoning

- Thinking that because a certain feeling is present, it must be true and a direct reflection of reality, regardless of any contrary evidence.
- EXAMPLE: Someone may tell himself or herself that because their situation feels hopeless, it really must be hopeless. Or, if someone feels very anxious and scared about something, it is proof that he or she is in danger.

Overgeneralization

- Overgeneralization is the process of taking one negative outcome or event and applying it to all areas of one's life.

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- It often involves phrases such as, “This (negative event) always happens to me,” or “I’ll never feel better.”
- EXAMPLE: If a man asks a woman out on a date and she declines, he may think to himself, “This always happens when I try to find a girlfriend. I’ll always be alone and never find someone.”

Jumping to conclusions

- This includes Mind Reading and Fortune Telling.
- Mind reading happens when we attribute intentions, attitudes, beliefs, or other mental activity to another person and simply assume that these are the case. EXAMPLE Assume that someone is thinking negative thoughts about you.
- Fortune telling involves predicting that the outcome will be negative. EXAMPLE: “I know that you won’t like what I am about to say, but

Personalization and blame

- Personalization occurs when someone thinks they are solely responsible for the outcome of an event and ignores other contributing factors. The opposite of personalization is blame. This happens when someone holds another person fully responsible for something without examining his or her own impact.

Labeling

- Labeling is applying a fixed, broad label to oneself or others that then shapes our experience and view of reality.
- EXAMPLE: “I’m worthless,” or “He is a selfish person.”

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Denial of Change

- Denial of change occurs when we become upset, indignant, or deny the reality that our lives are in a constant state of flux, and that situations and people are also constantly changing.
- EXAMPLE: Becoming very upset when our bodies age and we can no longer do all of the activities we once did.

HISTORY:

The theory behind common errors in thinking (or cognitive distortions) was first developed by psychologist Aaron Beck, and then further popularized by others, including Dr. David Burns in his book *The Feeling Good Handbook*. Most of the errors in thinking presented in this method come from Dr. Burns' book.

CAUTIONS:

It is important to note that EVERYONE has these errors in their thinking. Please be careful to not judge or beat up on yourself when you notice your thoughts contain some of these errors. Becoming aware of these negative thinking patterns can provide an opportunity to identify times when we are not thinking accurately, and then compassionately notice and correct them.