Thinking Barriers

We often think about ourselves and others in negative and inaccurate ways. Negative thoughts can keep us from feeling good about ourselves and our relationships. When you look at this list of thinking barriers, consider which ones seem to apply to your own experiences and relationships.

- **All or Nothing Thinking:** You view events or people in absolute terms: Every, Always, or Never. “No one likes me,” “I am unattractive,” or “I’m a failure.”

- **Mind Reading:** You assume you know how others are thinking without evidence. Or, you assume that others know how you feel or what you want. “I know he is mad at me,” or “People in the class think I am stupid.”

- **Fortune-Telling:** You predict that things will turn out badly, or that things will get worse. “I’m going to fail the exam,” “Nobody is going to talk to me at the party,” or “I won’t get a job.”

- **Shoulds and Musts:** You criticize yourself or others based on assumptions about how you should or must act. “I have to get an A on this exam,” or “I must graduate in four years.”

- **Emotional Reasoning:** You believe that what you feel must be true. “I feel lonely; therefore, I have no friends.”

- **Personalization:** You think that what others do or say is in reaction to you. You blame yourself for negative events. “He didn’t talk to me today. I must have done something to make him mad.”

- **Unfair Comparison:** You judge yourself based on unreasonable standards or make unrealistic comparisons to others. “She did better on the test so I am not as smart as she is.”
- **Labeling:** You label yourself with global negative traits. For example, instead of telling yourself you made a mistake, you tell yourself, “I can’t believe I messed that up; I am such an idiot.”

- **Overgeneralization:** You view a single event as evidence of a global pattern. “I got a D on this paper; I guess I’m not a good writer and never will be.”

- **Catastrophizing:** You focus on the worst possible outcome, however unlikely, or think that a situation is unbearable, and you won’t be able to handle it. “If we break up, I’ll never get over it.”

- **Negative Mental Filter:** You dwell on the negatives and generally ignore the positives. “I’ve gotten five Bs and one D on the tests. I’m sure I’ll end up with a D in the class.”

- **Discounting the Positives:** You claim that your achievements are trivial and, therefore, they don’t count. “I got a B because that test was easy.”

- **What Ifs:** You keep asking yourself “what if” something happens. “What if I fail the test?” “What if I can’t do it?” or “What if I never graduate?”

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