Unhelpful thinking styles

Common habits of mind that make things look worse than they are.

Everyone's mind takes shortcuts, especially under stress. These habits are normal. Once you can spot one, you can decide whether to go along with it.

All-or-nothing thinking

Seeing things as total success or total failure, with nothing in between. "I missed one session at the gym, so the whole week is ruined."

Catastrophising

Jumping to the worst possible outcome and treating it as likely. "This headache is probably something serious."

Mind reading

Assuming you know what others think, usually something bad about you. "They went quiet. They think I am boring."

Fortune telling

Predicting that things will go badly before they have happened. "There is no point applying. I will not get it."

Mental filter

Noticing the one thing that went wrong and filtering out everything that went well.

Discounting the positive

Explaining away good things. "They only said that to be nice."

Emotional reasoning

Taking a feeling as proof. "I feel like a fraud, so I must be one."

"Should" and "must"

Holding yourself or others to rigid rules. "I should be able to cope with this on my own."

Labelling

Summing up a whole person in one harsh word. "I am useless." "He is a waste of space."

Taking it personally

Blaming yourself for things that were not all down to you. "The meeting went flat. It was my fault."

Try this

Over the next week, see if you can catch one of these each day. You do not need to argue with it. Just name it: "That is mind reading again."

My notes and questions

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Spot the thinking style

Practise naming the habit before you try it on your own thoughts.

Name _____ Date _____

Read each thought. Which unhelpful thinking style is at work? There may be more than one. Then write a fairer way of putting it.

The thought	Thinking style	A fairer way of putting it
1. "I stumbled over one answer. The whole interview was a disaster."		
2. "He has not texted back. He has gone off me."		
3. "I feel so guilty, I must have done something wrong."		
4. "I should never need to ask for help."		
5. "They said the meal was lovely, but they were only being polite."		
6. "If I go to the party, nobody will talk to me."		
7. "I forgot her birthday. I am a terrible friend."		

Now my thoughts from this week

My thought	Thinking style	A fairer way of putting it

One way of reading them: 1 all-or-nothing thinking, 2 mind reading, 3 emotional reasoning, 4 "should" and "must", 5 discounting the positive, 6 fortune telling, 7 labelling. Several fit more than one.

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