

# Understanding Cognitive Distortions and Reframes in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)



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Cognitive Behavioral Therapy is a widely-used therapeutic approach that focuses on identifying and challenging distorted thought patterns to promote healthier and more rational thinking. One key aspect of CBT is recognizing and addressing cognitive distortions, which are inaccurate or biased ways of thinking. Reframing involves looking at these thoughts from a more balanced and realistic perspective. With time and practice this can become easier and more natural.

## Common Cognitive Distortions and Example Reframes:

### 1. All-or-Nothing Thinking (Black-and-White Thinking):

- *Description:* Seeing things in extreme, absolute terms without considering any middle ground.
- *Example:* "If I'm not perfect, then I'm a failure."
- *Reframe:* "I may not be perfect, but that doesn't mean I'm a failure. I can learn and improve from my mistakes."

### 2. Catastrophizing (Magnification/Minimization):

- *Description:* Exaggerating the importance of negative events and imagining the worst possible outcomes.
- *Example:* "If I make a mistake at work, I'll definitely get fired."
- *Reframe:* "While making mistakes is not ideal, it doesn't automatically lead to getting fired. I can learn from this experience and take steps to correct it."

### 3. Overgeneralization:

- *Description:* Making broad, sweeping conclusions based on a single event or piece of evidence.

- *Example:* "I failed one exam; I'm not cut out for college."
- *Reframe:* "Failing one exam doesn't define my ability. It's a setback, but I can use it as motivation to improve my study habits."

#### 4. Personalization:

- *Description:* Taking responsibility for external events that are beyond one's control.
- *Example:* "My friend is upset; it must be because of something I did."
- *Reframe:* "My friend's feelings are not solely my responsibility. There could be various reasons for their mood, and it may not be related to me."

#### 5. Filtering (Selective Abstraction):

- *Description:* Focusing exclusively on the negative details while ignoring the positive aspects of a situation.
- *Example:* "Even though I received praise for my work, I can't stop thinking about the one criticism."
- *Reframe:* "I received positive feedback, which is valuable. I can use the criticism as constructive feedback for improvement without dismissing the positives."

#### 6. Mind Reading:

- *Description:* Assuming you know what others are thinking or feeling without any concrete evidence.
- *Example:* "My friend hasn't texted me in a while; they must not like me."
- *Reframe:* "I can't know for sure why they haven't text me in a while. Instead of assuming negative intentions, I could reach out to see how they are doing and why they haven't been in touch."

#### 7. Discounting the Positive:

- *Description:* Minimizing or rejecting positive experiences, accomplishments, or feedback.
- *Example:* "Anyone could have done that; it's no big deal."
- *Reframe:* "Acknowledging my achievements is important. While others may be capable, I still accomplished something worthwhile."

#### 8. Should Statements:

- *Description:* Holding oneself or others to unrealistic and rigid standards.
- *Example:* "I should always be happy; feeling sad is unacceptable."
- *Reframe:* "It's okay to feel a range of emotions. No one is happy all the time. I can accept and explore my feelings rather than imposing unrealistic expectations."

#### 9. Emotional Reasoning:

- *Description:* Believing that feelings reflect objective reality.

- *Example:* "I feel anxious, so something bad must be about to happen."
- *Reframe:* "Feelings are not always accurate indicators of reality. I can acknowledge my anxiety and explore it without automatically assuming the worst outcome."

## 10. Labeling:

- *Description:* Assigning global, negative labels to oneself or others based on specific behaviors.
- *Example:* "I made a mistake; I'm such a failure."
- *Reframe:* "Making a mistake doesn't define my entire identity. I am a person who learns and grows from experiences, both positive and negative."

## Conclusion:

Recognizing and reframing cognitive distortions is a crucial step in the therapeutic process. By cultivating awareness and adopting more balanced thinking, we can develop a more balanced and realistic outlook, leading to improved emotional well-being and decision-making.