



Ascension

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## Self Talk

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**The private conversations that we have with ourselves in our minds are very powerful.**

These conversations, otherwise known as inner dialogue or self-talk, influence how we feel about ourselves, others, and the world. These thoughts then ultimately form our belief system. However, just because we think something, doesn't necessarily make it true, though we tend to take it as truth. So, when our thoughts are inaccurate, skewed, or off base in any way, it leads to developing a faulty belief system.

**Below is a crash course in what therapists call Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT).**

In short, CBT is a form of therapy that encourages individuals to challenge and then change unhelpful cognitive distortions (errors in the way that we think) and the behaviors connected to them.

### **What are cognitive distortions?**

As mentioned above, cognitive distortions are errors in the way that we think. Courtney Ackerman, author of the article "Cognitive Distortions: When Your Brain Lies To You," describes them as, "tendencies or patterns of thinking or believing that are false or inaccurate, and have the potential to cause psychological damage." Psychological damage makes this sound scary, but fear not, it simply means that if you're looking at yourself, others, or the world in a skewed light, then it's bound to limit you in some ways. Here is Courtney's article link that

describes cognitive distortions in greater detail and offers free worksheets:

[Cognitive Distortions: When Your Brain Lies to You \(+ PDF Worksheets\)](#)

### **Who uses cognitive distortions?**

In short, we all do. Some of us may use them infrequently and others may struggle with them regularly. One of the differences between which category we fall in depends on our ability to identify and then begin to correct those inaccurate statements. Individuals who struggle with anxiety or depressive symptoms may be more susceptible to using thinking errors.

### **What are the different types of cognitive distortions?**

Here are a few commonly used thinking errors:

- o Mind reading: Believing that we know what others are thinking about us (Ex: seeing someone with an unpleasant expression and jumping to the conclusion that they're thinking something negative about you).
- o All or Nothing Thinking: Thinking in extremes versus being able to see things in different shades of gray (Ex: It's either fantastic or awful! ...can't it be mediocre)?
- o Emotional reasoning: Accepting your emotions as fact. Believing that because I feel something, it must be true. (Ex: "I'm feeling nervous; therefore I must be in danger.")

Whereas there are many times that we may feel anxious and not be in any danger at all.

o Catastrophizing: Exaggerating the meaning, importance, or likelihood of things (Ex: An athlete who misses the final shot believing that he/she is a terrible teammate and lost the whole game for everyone).

**Below are a few websites that outline the most commonly used thinking errors. The last two are geared toward CBT for children.**

[PATTERNS OF COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS, from David Burns](#)

[Cognitive Distortion Types and Examples](#)

[How to Change Negative Thinking Patterns](#)

[CBT for Kids: Thoughts, Feelings, & Actions \(Worksheet\)](#)

**How do I “fix” thinking errors?**

After you’ve educated yourself on the different types of thinking errors AND you catch yourself using any of them, next you must begin to challenge them. Here are a few ways on how to begin changing the way that you think:

o Use a thought record: A thought record walks you through the steps of identifying and changing a thought. Steps involved include: identifying the situation that “triggered” you, the automatic thoughts connected to it; identification of emotions; identification of thinking errors; reframing the thoughts; a re-evaluation of emotion and how you feel about the new outcome.

o Look for evidence: When you look at the evidence (solid facts, NOT opinions), does the evidence support or rebuke your belief/thought?

o Identify a fair and balanced thought: Sometimes situations really are unfair, scary, out of control, etc. It’s okay to acknowledge that while also being fair to yourself. For example, instead of saying, “I’m such a failure,” reframing the thought to, “I didn’t do as well as I had hoped to, but I’m still smart and successful.”

o Check in with others: Check in with other people to see if they think there’s any accuracy to your belief.

o Be flexible with your automatic thoughts: Allow yourself to be less rigid in your beliefs and focus on allowing yourself to explore other plausible alternative explanations.

**Check out this link for other ideas:**  
[10 Proven Methods for Fixing Cognitive Distortions](#)

For more help on changing your self talk, contact Ascension WI EAP for free and confidential counseling services. Call or email today!