

# Negative Thinking – holding you back



The way you think on a daily basis significantly affects the way you feel. Negative thinking will directly result in you experiencing negative feelings, such as tiredness, anxiety and depression.

In this section you will learn about the different types of negative thinking you are likely to engage in. **Your task this week is simply to read through each of these distorted thinking styles and see if you can identify when, where and why you might be using them.**

## Distorted Thinking Styles

1. **ALL-OR-NOTHING THINKING:** You see things in black and white categories.  
**For example,** you have a goal to lose 20 kilos and you only lose 10 kilos. You see this as a total failure, rather than focusing on the positive fact that you've lost half your goal weight.
2. **OVERGENERALIZATION:** You see a single negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat or failure.  
**For example,** your boss is rude to you, so you start to believe he's NEVER polite or respectful, or you assume you'll never be able to learn any new skill that you attempt and fail the first time you try.
3. **MENTAL FILTER:** You pick out a single negative detail and dwell on it exclusively so that your vision of all reality becomes distorted.  
**For example,** 99% of the people who RSVP to your party show up and have a good time, however you focus on the 2 people who didn't show up and allow this to affect your perception of the success of the party overall.
4. **DISQUALIFYING THE POSITIVE:** You reject positive experiences by insisting they "don't count" for some reason or other.  
**For example,** you believe a friend is not very nice any longer. Thus, you make excuses for any kind gestures they make and just focus on their negative traits, or behaviours.

5. **JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS:** You make negative interpretations of events based on your perceptions of the situation even though the facts may disprove your perceptions.

- a. **Mind Reading.** *Example:* You conclude someone is reacting negatively to you because he gives you a 'funny' look, but you haven't asked if this is true (e.g. he may just be tired).
- b. **Fortune Telling Error.** *Example:* You anticipate that things will turn out badly, and feel convinced that your predictions are already fact (e.g. you assume you'll do badly on a test based on past experiences, even though you're better prepared this time). In this instance you can actually cause yourself to fail because you're so convinced it's going to happen).

6. **MAGNIFICATION (CATASTROPHIZING) OR MINIMIZATION:** You exaggerate the importance of things (e.g. you become self-conscious assuming everyone is staring at you in the gym), or you inappropriately shrink things (e.g. your attractive qualities), so it's hard for you to appreciate or believe in them.

7. **EMOTIONAL REASONING:** You assume that your negative emotions reflect reality. **For example,** you believe if you feel old, you must look old - to yourself and other people.

8. **SHOULD STATEMENTS:** You try to motivate yourself with 'should', 'must' and 'ought to' statements. These statements are based on rules you apply to your behaviour. **For example,** if you don't undertake a certain behaviour you believe you're a bad person.

The emotional consequence of this type of thinking is usually guilt, or resentment towards others who are not living by your rules.

9. **LABELING AND MISLABELING:** You attach a negative label to yourself or others. **For example,** when something goes wrong you make statements like: "I'm a loser", or "he's hopeless").

This distorted thinking style can be quite detrimental, as the focus is on the individual instead of the behaviour. This is why it's important to tell children that their behaviour was "naughty" rather than labelling the child as a "naughty boy".

10. **PERSONALIZATION:** You see yourself as the cause of some negative event which you were not primarily responsible for. **For example,** you're late for a party due to a traffic jam and you completely blame yourself for being late, even though the traffic jam couldn't have been avoided).