

Common Thinking Errors

Thinking errors allow a person to reduce mixed emotions and to continue to behave or think in non-responsible ways. Thinking errors allow a person to distance themselves emotionally from other people and to insulate themselves from the pain another person may feel. They can be used to defend a person's ego by supportive defense mechanisms such as rationalization. Most people use thinking errors on occasion to fulfill the natural desire to justify our attitudes beliefs, errors and mistakes.

Thinking Errors may allow the person to have distorted feelings of: a sense of power and control; a sense of self-worth; and a sense of general satisfaction with themselves. Once a thinking error is used, it often becomes necessary to support the distorted thinking. Often there is a need to engage in additional thinking errors to maintain the image that has been created. Thinking errors are generally utilized when an individual does not want to take responsibility for their actions or thoughts or feelings!

Absolutes

The use of absolute terms such as 'all, everyone, never, always, etc...' (is similar to 'All or None Thinking'). It fails to acknowledge the common gray areas of life, human thought and behavior. By using absolutes the person implies the existence of absolute standards for thought and behavior. Absolutes fail to recognize that this type of standard is the exception rather than the rule in human behavior. (* See 'Absolutes' word list at bottom)

All or Nothing Thinking (See 'Absolutes')

The person sees things in black and white or either/or categories. If his/her or another's performance falls short of perfect, they see themselves (or the other) as a total failure. Often the choices the person makes seem to be between two opposites. The person fails to recognize the many alternative solutions that are possible or that reality is somewhere between the two extremes.

Anger

Anger may be used to manipulate and control others. When the person is confronted with their own inappropriate behavior, becoming angry or enraged can cause the attention to be focused on this reaction rather than the problem. The person then is no longer accountable for their initial inappropriate behavior. Tantrums, aggression and outrage gain the person center stage and everyone's attention is directed to control of the anger rather than on the person and the initial act. (See 'Let's Fight')

Assumptions/Assumed Intent

This error allows the person to believe that they know something about a situation about what other people are thinking. By 'reading others minds' the person may excuse themselves from actually finding out the reality of the other's thoughts. Once a thought is 'read' or the situation 'known' then any reaction is justified based not that 'data'. This allows the person to continue their behavior and blame the other person or the situation at the same time

Avoiding The Hot Iron

This is a type of denial. Refusal to see how one's behavior causes problems. This is often done with other Thinking Errors like 'Let's Fight' or 'Excuses'. Distractions like chasing the subject also work well when using this Thinking Error.

Blaming

This is a type of excuse. It allows the person to avoid finding a solution to the problem by shifting the responsibility to others. This also allows the person to build up resentment toward someone else for 'causing' the situation to occur. Blaming can divert attention away from the person and allow others with a connection to the person to focus on a 'safer' target.

"He always makes me mad and makes me pop off and say things that I regret."

"You are always pointing your finger at me."

Catastrophizing

The person exaggerates the importance of a situation. A mistake or goof-up results in predictions of severe negative consequences. Often these predictions have little or no chance of actually occurring naturally. The Chicken Little Syndrome. (* See 'Magnifying & Catastrophizing' word list at bottom)

Confusion

The person may present themselves as confused or puzzled by the situation in order to not take responsibility for their actions. In addition, such confusion may encourage others to take on the problem and solve it for the person. This may then allow the person to sabotage the solution and blame others for the failure. This technique makes the person look cooperative and compliant, but is a way to gain power and control.

Discounting The Positives

Rejecting any positive that may come into your life. "That doesn't count". Refusing to allow yourself to acknowledge your accomplishments, abilities, characteristics etc... Often associated with 'Poor Me' or 'Seeking Sympathy'. When used toward others, this often takes the form of 'Minimizing'.

Dump On Me

By always putting oneself down and encouraging others to do the same, one can avoid actual change. Somehow it looks good if you are so aware of your shortcomings. This is a smoke screen of self-awareness. Related to 'Discounting Positives'.

Emotional Reasoning

The person believes the emotional state they are experiencing to be a permanent trait. The person fails to understand that most emotions are transient and ever changing.
"I feel helpless so there must not be anything I can do about the situation."

Entitlement

The person believes that there are things that they rightfully deserve, just for being who they are, regardless of whether they have earned them or not.
"I'm an adult, he owes my respect."

Excuses

This allows the person to have a reason for everything. Common excuses are a shifting of blame on to someone else, external circumstances or the environment.

"It happened because my family is black (poor, rich, didn't care, etc...)"

"It happened because the town I lived in was very strict."

Fact Stacking

By explaining what happened in a certain sequence or by omission of certain facts/details the person may present a distorted view of the situation which may benefit them. (Related to 'White Lies')

Fortune Telling

The person anticipates the outcome of a situation and then acts as if it has already happened or as if it is inevitable that it will occur. (See 'Assumptions' & 'Catastrophizing')

Global Labeling

Instead of describing unacceptable behavior, the person attaches a negative label to the individual. "I'm a loser." "He's a fool", "I'm stupid" and then acts accordingly.

Grandiosity (see 'Catastrophizing')

Turning small unimportant things into very important things. This may take the form of wish fulfillment. This thinking error allows the person to distract themselves and others from more important issues by focusing on less important ones. This technique has been called 'setting brush fires' and 'making a mountain out of a mole hill'. In a very grand, controlled, and

dramatic way the person may set small fires of controversy or otherwise avoid the issue by focusing on things that are insignificant to avoid or discount the truly significant issues.

Helplessness

By thinking of or presenting oneself as helpless, incapable and in need of others, the person is setting themselves up as someone who is unable to be responsible. As with confusion, the person gains control through this manipulation and potentially sets others up to be made fools of. Telling yourself that you are helpless in a situation excuses you from taking responsible action.

Hop-Over

Sudden change of subject when the issue gets uncomfortable or threatening. Related to 'Avoiding the Hot Iron' and 'Secretiveness'. By often changing the subject, one prevents others from getting close or understanding him/her too well.

I Can't

The statement, "I can't", is really a re-statement of "I won't". It represents the choice not to behave responsibly. By making it sound impossible, one does not have to consider the choices or make the hard decision.

I Don't Care ("Duzzin's as in "Duzzin' Bother Me")

Similar to 'Refusal to Acknowledge Fear'. By cutting oneself off from negative experiences, usually judgment by another, the person eliminates the adverse feelings that provide motivation to learn and change. By not acknowledging the negative feelings these types of experiences produce, the normal socialization process is impeded.

I Forgot

The person believes or attempts to convince others or himself that his/her poor memory is separate from the person. It is a direct attempt to excuse themselves from accepting responsibility for their actions or inactions.

It's Mine

This is the failure to acknowledge that one's own personal rights end at the point that they begin to infringe on another's. This error may be accomplished by taking for granted and prejudging how others should and ought to behave. (See 'Entitlement' & 'My Way')

Justifying

Similar to 'Blaming' and 'Excuse Making', by allowing the person to explain the 'reason' for things. This allows the person to find a reason for the way things are rather than looking at what they could have done to make things different.

“Why should I care about her feelings anyway?”

“That is just the way a real man does things.”

“I really need this money and they are so rich that they will never miss it.”

Keeping Score

If the person is angry and hostile internally, rather than work the problems out, the person may choose to deal with anger and hostility by keeping track of others' mistakes. If the person is criticized, the score may be used as a distracter away from self and one's issues. Keeping score may also be used to keep track of what is owed to the person for previous helpful (or hurtful) acts. (See 'Phoniness')

This type of score keeping is used to manipulate others and to perpetuate conflict. (See 'Anger')

Leave Me Alone / Closed Channel Communication

This is the refusal to allow feedback (positive or constructive) to have an impact. The person avoids either: feeling reinforced for a positive behavior (more likely to do it again) or recognizing that they need to change some negative behavior. 'Leave Me Alone' is often related to 'My Way'.

Let's Fight

The person may get others to fight while s/he stands back as the innocent bystander. By manipulation and controlling others into becoming hostile and aggressive, the person can be a shining example of maturity and responsibility. Often the manipulation is completed by providing information that will be upsetting to some people so that others will 'fight'. The person may then enter the conflict and even attempt to resolve the conflict. This makes the person appear powerful and in control. Often the result is that the 'peacemaker' sets up his/her way.

Lying

Lies are used to confuse, distort, or make fools of others. There are three types of lies.

- A. Pure and simple. Making things up that are not true. This is a direct refusal to accept responsibility.
- B. White Lies/Distortions: A partial truth, often with important information left out or deliberately linking it to something that is really unrelated.
- C. Non-verbal lies. The person may act as if they think/feel one way while secretly feeling/believing otherwise. Ex: agreeing with what is being stated or supporting a person while thinking or feeling contrary. This may encourage the other person to make a mistake which may make the liar look better.

Making Fools Of

Allowing the other person to make false assumptions by deliberately making statements that are misleading or vague. By keeping others waiting, wondering or hoping, the person is in a powerful position. By making fool of others, the person feels more powerful and in control because others are misinformed regarding their actions. The person can then abuse this power by failing to follow through or causing an unexpected outcome making the other person feel foolish or stupid.

Mental Filter

The person focuses on only the negative/positive or supporting aspects that are consistent with their point of view while ignoring the balancing aspects of the situation (Tunnel Vision)

Minimizing

Allows the person to believe that what they have done is really not that important (bad, good, harmful, etc...) In this way, the person is able to resist the change they might experience if allowed the reality of the situation to impact them. Often a single aspect of reality is focused upon thereby minimizing the entire act.

“At least I didn’t steal the purse, only the money.”

“She has heard worse things in her life.”

My Way

By not listening to what others have to say and by ignoring others’ needs, questions and comments, the person focuses on getting things done only on their terms and under their conditions. Testing established limits (rules/laws) may be a manifesting of the ‘My Way’ thinking error. ‘Helplessness’ and ‘Confusion’ may also be used in ‘My Way’. ‘My Way’ is a very powerful method of preventing the external world from having an impact on the self.

Over-Generalization

The person perceives a single negative event as a never-ending pattern. The person may also take one example of their own or another’s behavior and draw unwarranted conclusions about themselves or the person. Over generalization is usually based on some assumption(s).

Over-Personalization

The person believes that everything people do or say is some kind of reaction to them personally.

Phoniness

This error occurs when the person pretends to be cooperative and helpful, while in fact seeking to manipulate or ignore. Often this leads to a 'Score Keeping'.

"I was nice to you so you must be nice to me!"

Poor Me

The 'Poor Me' error is similar to 'Seeking Sympathy'. However, it also allows the person to pity themselves and rationalize or justify why the world owes them a better life. By blaming external things, the person no longer feels responsible for their feelings or their behavior. They can then believe that their behavior is a natural reaction to their condition.

"I was so broke that I had no choice but to mug and beat up that old man, so I wouldn't starve to death."

Power Play

The person may define his/her self worth in terms of power and control over others. Thus, using people becomes a 'right' (because I can). The goal is for conquest and triumph over the will of others so the person's self esteem is enhanced. (related to 'My Way').

Redefining

Shifts the focus of an issue to avoid solving the problem.

Q: "Why did you skip school today?"

A: "I've been to school every other day this week."

Q: "Have you paid your speeding ticket?"

A: "I think that the radar gun that he used was inaccurate."

Refusal to Acknowledge Fear

By cutting oneself off from the experience of fear, one eliminates the adverse feelings that fear provides as motivation to learn and change. By not acknowledging fear, the normal socialization process is impeded.

Secretiveness

By maintaining a veil of secrecy, the person can avoid addressing the reality of the situation. Avoiding full disclosure of one's intentions, motivations, beliefs and personal history protects the person from critical evaluation. If the person keeps secrets and others want him/her to give the secrets up, the person may obtain power and control. (See 'Making Fools Of') Part of 'Closed Channel Communications'.

Seeking Sympathy

Sympathy seeking allows the person to feel better about their situation by presenting themselves as wronged, beleaguered or unfairly treated. (Related to 'Poor Me'). Often the person presents themselves as unjustly suffering the consequences of another's actions, ie 'Blaming'.

"She started it but, I'm the one going to jail."

"I've worked hard all day and now I have to go home and fix my own meal just because she wants to watch the kid's stupid school play."

"Shoulds" and "Oughts"

The person has a list of ironclad rules and behavior. They feel guilty when they break the rule and angry when anyone else does. They fail to question the validity of the rules under all conditions. Related to 'All or Nothing Thinking'. They do not recognize that others may operate under a different set of rules.

Super Optimism

Related to 'Grandiosity'. The person sees the world, or their part of it, only in the most positive light (Rose colored glasses) and ignores any risks or potential problems with the way they are thinking, feeling or behaving.

Uniqueness

This error allows the person to believe that s/he is so special that rules or norms don't apply to them. It allows the person to distance themselves from others. Often a person using this error will shut out feedback being given to them by refusing to believe that it applies to them. Another way it may be shown is by the person asking for special consideration because of their 'special circumstances'.

Vagueness

Vagueness is an intentional act to avoid being pinned down to specifics. If one is vague, then his/her actions can never be judged accurately. This may be presented as innocent stupidity or misunderstanding. If the person is vague and unsure then they may not have to look at the reality of their shortcomings. (See 'Hop-Over')

Victim Status

The person may present him/herself as a victim in order to manipulate and control others. This is a form of passive/aggressive behavior and is often used with people that care about the person. If the person is seen as a victim, others may rush to his/her defense/rescue and the inappropriate behavior will be overlooked. Physical complaints, emotional illness such as depression, financial devastation, or status as a childhood victim of abuse or neglect, can all be tools to obtain Victim Status. (See 'Blaming', 'Entitlement', & 'Seeking Sympathy')

Yes, But... I

This is a one way street for ignoring the things others are saying to you. Citing the reasons why a suggestion will not work, allows you to avoid any problem-solving to discover how it will or could work. “Yes, but” maintain the status quo and thus are a way to resist change. They also put the person offering the solution on the defensive and send the message, “You’re not smart enough to help me”.

OPEN CHANNEL COMMUNICATION (OCC)

One powerful tool to combat thinking errors such as these is ‘Open Channel Communications’.

There are three basic aspects to ‘OCC’.

1. You allow others’ constructive criticism to have an impact on you (you let it in.)
2. You share with others your true thoughts and feelings (including constructive criticism.)
3. You are self evaluative. You consider your thoughts and actions in light of feedback from others and honestly judge whether corrective actions are required.

MAGNIFYING & CATASTROPHIZING

WORD LIST

abhorrent
abominable
appalling
awful
beastly
contemptible
cursed
damned
damnable
despicable
detestable
defiled
disgusting
dreadful
filthy
foul
fucked
fucked up
hateful
horrible
horrific
indecent
loathsome
mean
nasty
nauseating
noisome
obscene
offensive
odious
perverted
pervert
repulsive
sickening
shameful
terrible
ungodly
vile

ABSOLUTES

WORD LIST

all
always
any
anytime
anyone
altogether
at no time
ceaselessly
complete
completely
constantly
continually
continuously
each
entirely
every
everyone
every time
exactly
invariably
in no way
inevitable
just
not at all
not even
not ever
never again
nevermore
perfect
totally
unceasing
unceasingly
whole