

## New Ways of Thinking

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*There are thoughts that plague me, that go around and around in my head. I feel like I have no control over them. They don't do me any good, and they make me feel terrible.*

### Negative Thinking

I used to tell myself over and over again how worthless I am, how bad I look, and that everything is hopeless. Irrational phobias about crowds and heights limited my experience. I was plagued with unrealistic fears for my own safety and well-being, as well as that of my family and, sometimes, the whole world.

People who experience depression or manic depression and other psychiatric symptoms are often plagued by obsessive, largely irrational thoughts. The authors of *The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook* note that this type of thinking is characterized by “repetitive and intrusive thoughts that are unrealistic, unproductive, and often anxiety producing.”

Much of what you feel is caused by what you tell yourself, how you think, the ways in which you choose to interpret situations, and your personal point of view. Many people, when they're young, develop the habit of filling themselves with negative thoughts about themselves and the circumstances of their lives. In effect, people program themselves and their lives to be a particular way. Negative programming can be reinforced by one's family situations and by societal expectations.

Negative obsessive thoughts can take the form of self-doubt, generalized fears, and specific phobias. Participants in the study shared the negative thoughts that plague them in these three general categories. Mark the thoughts that you identify with, then add your own thoughts to the list.

### **Self-Doubt**

- I will never be able to get this job done.
- I don't look good enough for anyone to like me.
- I am not smart enough to figure this out.

**List your own self-doubts:** \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Fears**

- The house will catch on fire.
- We will have a bad accident and all be killed.
- I think I have cancer.
- I will never be well.
- I will have another deep depression and land in the hospital.
- I will experience all the side effects of this drug.

**List other fears you have:** \_\_\_\_\_

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### Phobias

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| <input type="checkbox"/> bugs                   | <input type="checkbox"/> spiders               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> snakes                 | <input type="checkbox"/> dogs                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> cats                   | <input type="checkbox"/> birds                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> horses                 | <input type="checkbox"/> guns                  |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> flying                 | <input type="checkbox"/> deep water            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> darkness               | <input type="checkbox"/> public bathrooms      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> stores                 | <input type="checkbox"/> crowds                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> small, enclosed places | <input type="checkbox"/> going out             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> going out alone        | <input type="checkbox"/> medications           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> injections             | <input type="checkbox"/> doctors               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> dentists               | <input type="checkbox"/> driving               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> driving on freeways    | <input type="checkbox"/> driving on dirt roads |

List other phobias you have: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Distorted Thinking Styles

On examination, negative thinking can very often be identified as distorted thinking. When you become aware of the distortions in your thinking, you will be able to actually change negative thoughts to positive ones, effectively eliminating the depression and anxiety that these thoughts create.

Distorted thoughts can be easily identified because they 1) cause painful emotions, such as worry, depression, or anxiety, and/or 2) cause you to have ongoing conflicts with

other people. Fifteen distorted thinking styles are examined in *Thoughts and Feelings* by Matthew McKay, Martha Davis, and Patrick Fanning.

As you read through the definitions and examples that follow, think about how your own thinking has been distorted through the years. Answering the questions will help you come up with ways in which to combat your distorted perceptions. For each distorted perception, you'll be asked to come up with a rational comeback to knock it down. The examples show you how.

## *Filtering*

Filtering entails looking at only one part of a situation to the exclusion of everything else.

*Example.* "Thanksgiving is going to be a disaster. I get along so horribly with my mother."

*Distorted Perception.* "My enjoyment of the Thanksgiving holiday depends exclusively on how I get along with my mother."

*Rational Comeback.* "Even though I often fight with my mother or feel hurt by her, I have a great relationship with my father and sister, brother-in-law, and nephew. They're going to be there, too, and there's a good chance that I'll have a decent time."

**Think of an example when you filtered your thoughts:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Identify the distorted perception in your example:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**How did you feel when you filter your thoughts in this way?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**When you filter your thoughts does it ever cause conflict between yourself and others? Describe examples of this:** \_\_\_\_\_

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Write a rational comeback to replace your distorted perception: \_\_\_\_\_

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### *Polarized Thinking*

This distortion involves perceiving everything at the extremes, as either black or white, with nothing in between. You can understand how polarized thinking is a particular pitfall for people who have mood swings! Things are all great, or all horrible: there's no middle ground.

*Example.* "I had trouble scraping together the money for the rent this month. I'm a horrible spouse, and a failure as a provider."

*Distorted Perception.* "My financial performance this month defines my worth as a spouse and a provider."

*Rational Comeback.* "I had a bad month, without a lot of work. Sometimes I have much better months. My wife says that she loves me and that I'm a good husband, no matter what kind of month I've had. The economy's bad now, and we're both working hard to make ends meet."

Think of an example of when you've used polarized thinking: \_\_\_\_\_

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Identify the distorted perception in your example: \_\_\_\_\_

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How did you feel when your thoughts were polarized in this way? \_\_\_\_\_

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**When you've used polarized thinking, has it ever caused conflict between yourself and others? (Describe)** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Write a rational comeback to replace your distorted perception:** \_\_\_\_\_

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### *Overgeneralization*

When you overgeneralize, you reach a broad, generalized conclusion based on just one piece of evidence.

*Example.* "My friend rejected me, therefore nobody will ever love me."

*Distorted Perception.* "This one rejection is the sole determinant of whether or not I'll be loved by other people in the future."

*Rational Comeback.* "Just because this one friend rejected me, it doesn't mean that no one will ever love me again. It just means that the one person rejected me. Many people do like me, and I continue to make new friends."

**Give an example of when you've used overgeneralization in your thinking:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Identify the distorted perception in your example:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**How did you feel when you overgeneralized?** \_\_\_\_\_

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When you've overgeneralized in the past, has it caused conflict between yourself and others? (Describe) \_\_\_\_\_

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Write a rational comeback to replace your distorted perception: \_\_\_\_\_

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### *Mind Reading*

Mind reading is just what it sounds like: you base assumptions and conclusions on your "ability" to know other people's thoughts.

*Example.* "He looked at his watch while I was in the middle of my presentation. I became afraid that I was boring everyone."

*Distorted Perception.* "I know what he was thinking about when he looked at his watch."

*Rational Comeback.* "Only he knows what he was thinking about when he looked at his watch (if it was even a conscious gesture). It more than likely had no reference to me or my presentation."

Can you think of a time when you've used the cognitive distortion of mind reading? \_\_

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Identify the distorted perception in your example: \_\_\_\_\_

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How did it make you feel when you assumed that you could read other people's minds (and when you saw unflattering thoughts there)? \_\_\_\_\_

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When you've fallen prey to mind reading, has it caused conflict between yourself and others? (Describe) \_\_\_\_\_

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Write a rational comeback to replace your distorted perception: \_\_\_\_\_

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## *Catastrophizing*

When you catastrophize, as the word suggests, you turn everything into a catastrophe, always expecting the worst-case scenario.

*Example.* "My son has a cold that's probably going to turn into pneumonia—my God, he's going to die!"

*Distorted Perception.* "Colds always lead to pneumonia and, ultimately, death."

*Rational Comeback.* "My son is strong and healthy, and uses good judgment. He takes good care of himself. If his cold gets any worse, he'll see a doctor. He'll get antibiotics if he needs them."

Can you think of an example of catastrophic thinking on your part? \_\_\_\_\_

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Identify the distorted perception in your example: \_\_\_\_\_

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How did it make you feel to think this way? \_\_\_\_\_

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When you've used catastrophic thinking, has it caused conflict between yourself and others? (Describe) \_\_\_\_\_

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Write a rational comeback to replace your distorted perception: \_\_\_\_\_

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### *Personalization*

When your thinking is distorted by personalization, you interpret everything around you in ways that reflect on you and, often, your self-worth. Personalization is a double-edged sword, in that sometimes it makes you feel great—as when everyone you deal with in the course of a day is kind and cheerful, and you take this as a sign of your winning personality and charm. But the grumpy person you encounter, who isn't won over by your brightest smile, can convince you that you've lost your looks, your personality has gone flat, and you've just been fooling yourself all these years.

*Example.* "If I'd done a better job as a mother, my daughter wouldn't be depressed."

*Distorted Perception.* "I should be able to control my daughter's happiness or unhappiness."

*Rational Comeback.* "No one—not even a parent—can determine whether another individual is happy or unhappy. My daughter's depression is determined by many factors, and unfortunately most of these are beyond my control."

Can you think of an example of when you have used personalization? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Identify the distorted perception in your example:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**How did it make you feel when you've used personalization?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**When you've used personalization, has it caused conflict between yourself and others? (Describe)** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Write a rational comeback to replace your distorted perception:** \_\_\_\_\_

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## *Control Fallacies*

This distortion entails feeling either that the events in your life are totally controlled by a force outside of yourself or that you are responsible for everything.

*Example 1.* "What's the use of looking for work in my field? Everyone who's any good already has a job."

*Distorted Perception.* "No one who's competent ever has to look for a job; the work just magically appears."

*Rational Comeback.* "I've got to play an active role in getting work—even geniuses have to pound the pavement sometimes and knock on doors. People aren't necessarily thinking about me (and passing me over) when they hand out jobs to other freelancers. I've got to remind all my contacts in the field that I'm available."

*Example 2.* "How can I possibly take a vacation now? The whole office will fall apart if I leave."

*Distorted Perception.* “Even though lots of other people are employed at my office, I’m the one who’s really doing all the work and holding things together.”

*Rational Comeback.* “The staff has been structured so that every employee can take a vacation once a year—including me. My work is certainly important, but it’s no more important than anyone else’s; and it’s important for me to take my vacation, too.”

**Can you think of an example of when you have used one or both of the control fallacies?**

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**Identify the distorted perception in your example:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**How have you felt when you’ve used this fallacy?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**When you’ve used control fallacies, has it caused conflict between yourself and others? (Describe)** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Write a rational comeback to replace your distorted perception:** \_\_\_\_\_

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## *Fallacy of Fairness*

When you use the fairness fallacy, you fall into the trap of judging people's actions by rules that you've concocted about what is and what isn't fair. The trouble is that in personal interactions at least, everyone has different ideas about fairness, so you're bound to wind up feeling hurt, slighted, or wronged.

*Example.* "If my husband really cared about my wellness, he'd take on more responsibility with the house and kids."

*Distorted Perception.* "How much my husband cares about my wellness is defined by the amount of housework he takes on."

*Rational Comeback.* "My husband does a lot of other things that show how much he cares about my wellness: he's very attentive and tender toward me, he reads to me in bed, he does all the yardwork, takes care of the dogs, and works very hard at his job (which pays my doctors' bills). I can talk to him about feeling overburdened by the housework and all the demands the kids make on me. If we work together, we might find some solutions."

**Can you think of an example of when you used the fallacy of fairness?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Identify the distorted perception in your example:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**How did you feel when you used the fallacy of fairness?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**When you've used this distortion, has it ever caused conflict between yourself and others? (Describe)** \_\_\_\_\_

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Write a rational comeback to replace your distorted perception: \_\_\_\_\_

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### *Emotional Reasoning*

This is the mistaken belief that everything you feel must be true.

*Example.* "I feel stupid, therefore I must be stupid."

*Distorted Perception.* "My subjective feelings always reflect reality."

*Rational Comeback.* "My opinions about myself change all the time, often depending on my mood. No one is *just* smart or *just* stupid. I probably make poor choices or use poor judgment sometimes, but that's just part of being human. Most people would probably say that I'm pretty intelligent."

Can you think of an example of when you have used emotional reasoning? \_\_\_\_\_

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Identify the distorted perception in your example: \_\_\_\_\_

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How did you feel when you used emotional reasoning? \_\_\_\_\_

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When you've used emotional reasoning, has it caused conflict between yourself and others? (Describe) \_\_\_\_\_

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**Write a rational comeback to replace your distorted perception:** \_\_\_\_\_

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## *Fallacy of Change*

This is the assumption that other people will change to suit you if you pressure them enough. The illusion is that your happiness depends on bringing about these changes. Co-dependent behavior, which you may have read about in other contexts, relies heavily on this fallacy.

*Example.* "If my father would only start going to AA meetings, we could make another attempt at having a decent relationship."

*Distorted Perception.* "The quality of my relationship with my father depends on whether or not he goes to AA meetings."

*Rational Comeback.* "I have no control over whether or not Dad goes to AA meetings. The only part of our relationship that I *can* control has to do with my own thoughts and feelings and actions. To the extent that I can change these, I can change our relationship."

**Can you think of an example of when you have used the fallacy of change?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Identify the distorted perception in your example:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**How did you feel when you used the fallacy of change?** \_\_\_\_\_

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When you've used this distortion, did it ever cause conflict between yourself and others? (Describe) \_\_\_\_\_

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Write a rational comeback to replace your distorted perception: \_\_\_\_\_

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### *Global Labeling*

This is making a broad judgment based on very little evidence.

*Example.* "One of the mangos I bought at that store turned out to be rotten, therefore the store has rotten produce and I'm never going back there."

*Distorted Perception.* "It's accurate to judge the quality of this store's merchandise on the basis of one piece of fruit."

*Rational Comeback.* "Just because I got one bad mango does not mean that the store as a whole is no good. It just means that they had some rotten mangos. (If I go back and tell them, maybe they'll give me a refund—or a better mango!)"

Can you think of an example of when you have used global labeling? \_\_\_\_\_

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Identify the distorted perception in your example: \_\_\_\_\_

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**How did you feel when you used global labeling?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**When you used global labeling, did it cause conflict between yourself and others? (Describe)** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Write a rational comeback to replace your distorted perception:** \_\_\_\_\_

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## *Blaming*

This is a very common distortion and is just what it sounds like: bad things that happen are someone's fault, either yours or someone else's.

*Example.* "I'm depressed because my family of origin was completely dysfunctional."

*Distorted Perception.* "Dysfunctional families always cause people to suffer from depression when they grow up."

*Rational Comeback.* "It's true that I grew up in a dysfunctional family; but my depression has also involved a lot of other factors, including choices I've made and continue to make."

**Can you think of an example of when you have used the logical distortion of blaming?**

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**Identify the distorted perception in your example:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**How did you feel when you used blaming as an explanation?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**When you've used blaming, has it ever caused conflict between yourself and others? (Describe)** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Write a rational comeback to replace your distorted perception:** \_\_\_\_\_

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### *Shoulds*

This entails operating from a rigid set of indisputable rules about how everyone, including yourself, should act.

*Example.* "I should never feel jealous."

*Distorted Perception.* "My behavior should always conform to a rigid set of rules."

*Rational Comeback.* "I'm as subject to as wide a range of emotions as any other human being. Jealousy is one of these emotions."

**What are some of your shoulds, the rigid rules that you invoke for yourself and others?**

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**How do you feel when you think in terms of shoulds?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**When you use shoulds, does it ever cause conflict between yourself and others? (Describe)** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Write a rational comeback to each of the shoulds you listed above:** \_\_\_\_\_

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## *Being Right*

This distortion involves continually needing to justify your point of view or way of behaving. The need to be right can make it impossible for you to really listen when someone offers a new perspective or a conflicting point of view. For an example, consider the following dialogue:

*Example.*

*Daughter:* I felt so sad after our visit. I felt like you were completely indifferent to me when I arrived and when I left, even though it had been six months since we'd seen each other.

*Mother:* I swear to God, no matter what I do, it's never right and it's never enough. All my friends think I'm just great—it's my kids who complain about me.

*Daughter:* I cried as I drove away. I kept saying to myself that I'm a good person and a lovable person, even though you don't seem to think so.

*Mother:* I don't know what you want from me, Susan. I've tried everything, and all I get is criticism. We used to have a great relationship before you were married. I don't know what happened.

*Daughter:* Mom, I've been married for 17 years!

*Distorted*

*Perception.* [Mother] "It's impossible that I'm at fault."

**Can you think of an example of when you have used being right as a cognitive distortion?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Identify the distorted perception in your example:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**How did you feel when you used being right?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Has this distortion ever caused conflict between yourself and others? (Describe)** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Write a rational comeback to replace your distorted perception:** \_\_\_\_\_

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## *Heaven's Reward Fallacy*

This could be called the martyr's fallacy. You believe that if you always do the right thing, you will eventually be rewarded (even if doing the right thing means ignoring your own needs).

*Example.* "My career comes second after my kids. Actually, I'm ready to postpone my career for 20 years, if need be, to give my children the attention they need. I may be messed up; but if it's the last thing I do, I'm going to make sure that my daughter has good self-esteem."

*Distorted Perception.* "My self-sacrifice will make my children into happy individuals, and I will be proved in the end to be a good mother."

*Rational Comeback.* "How can my daughter possibly end up with good self-esteem when she has me for a role model? I'm the family doormat! I love my kids, but it's a waste to put a successful career on hold for 20 years. I can work out a compromise between my needs and theirs—and we'll all be happier as a result!"

**Can you think of an example of when you have used the heaven's reward fallacy? \_\_\_\_\_**

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**Identify the distorted perception in your example: \_\_\_\_\_**

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**How did you feel when you used the heaven's reward fallacy? \_\_\_\_\_**

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**Did this ever cause conflict between yourself and others? (Describe) \_\_\_\_\_**

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Write a rational comeback to replace your distorted perception: \_\_\_\_\_

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## A Four-Step Process for Eliminating Distorted Thoughts

There are several simple and very effective techniques for eliminating stress-producing, distorted, and negative thought patterns or changing them to positive ones. By systematically examining thought patterns and applying behavioral techniques, you can change the way you think and feel about yourself and your life. This will have a profound effect on your moods, and will greatly enhance the quality of your life. The four steps in this process involve

- Identifying your emotion
- Describing the situation that gave rise to the emotion
- Identifying the distortion in your thought process
- Refuting the distortion

Read through the example below.

### 1. What emotion (or emotions) are you feeling now?

*I am feeling angry, tense, and anxious.*

### 2. Describe, in detail, the event or situation that gave rise to your emotion.

*I went to my friend Peter's house at 4:00 P.M., as previously arranged, to go for a walk and have dinner together. He was not at home when I got there.*

### 3. Describe your thoughts, and identify any distortions in your thinking.

*Because Peter wasn't there, I decided he really didn't want to spend the time with me, that he really doesn't like me and doesn't respect my feelings. (This would fit in the category of mindreading.)*

### 4. Refute the distortions.

*There was only one piece of evidence, his not being there when I arrived, that was the basis for my distortion. The truth is, Peter and I have been close friends for a long time. All evidence indicates that he likes me a lot. An emergency may have come up, he may have gone to do an errand that took longer than anticipated, he may have misunderstood the plan that we made or he may have forgotten that we made a plan (or I may have misunderstood)—any of which are acceptable reasons and do nothing to lend credence to my distorted thought. The best course of action for me would be to wait on his porch (doing relaxation exercises) until his return; or leave him a note asking him to call me when he gets in.*

Practice using this four-step process to work on straightening out your distorted thoughts. For your first try, choose a situation in which the distortion in your thinking is

fairly easy for you to identify. As the process becomes clearer, you can work on situations in which the distortion is more subtle (or in which there are several distortions operating at once). Use separate sheets of paper to analyze each situation.

**1. What emotion (or emotions) are you feeling now?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**2. Describe in detail the event or situation that gave rise to your emotions:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**3. Describe your thoughts and identify any distortions in your thinking:** (Refer to the descriptions of distorted thinking styles in this chapter.) \_\_\_\_\_

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**4. Refute the distortions:** \_\_\_\_\_

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As you grow more familiar with this process, it will come as second nature to you, so that you can straighten out your thought distortions before they have a negative effect on your mood.

# Thought Stopping

Thought stopping is a simple way to bring thoughts to consciousness and eliminate them. By eliminating a negative thought, you can eliminate the emotions and feelings that go along with it.

## *Step 1. Identify a Negative Thought for Target Practice*

Review the self-doubts, fears, and phobias that you listed earlier. Check off those that are currently most bothersome, cause you the most stress, and interfere the most with your life. Then choose one of these thoughts to practice on. It's best to begin with a thought whose logic is pretty easy to topple. As you grow more adept, you can tackle more and more formidable beliefs and notions.

**Bothersome Thought:** \_\_\_\_\_

Ask yourself the following questions to determine whether this thought needs to be changed:

*Is this thought realistic or unrealistic?* \_\_\_\_\_

*Is the thought productive or counterproductive?* \_\_\_\_\_

*Is this thought easy or hard to control?* \_\_\_\_\_

*How uncomfortable does this thought make me feel?* \_\_\_\_\_

*How much does this thought interfere with my life?* \_\_\_\_\_

## Sample Thought-Stopping Exercise

**Bothersome Thought:** *I'm afraid that I'll have another deep depression and need hospitalization.*

**Is this thought realistic or unrealistic?** *It is realistic, because I have had deep depressions before for which I needed to be hospitalized. However, the circumstances of my life have changed significantly since then. I understand depression. I have an excellent support system of health care workers, family members, and friends. I watch for early warning signs and get help early. Several related medical problems have been appropriately treated. I use relaxation techniques, exercise regularly, and carefully manage my diet. I have eliminated sugar and caffeine from my diet. There is limited stress in my life and I have learned to handle stress that is unavoidable.*

**Is the thought productive or counterproductive?** *Definitely counterproductive.*

**Is this thought easy or hard to control?** *At times this thought is very hard to control.*

**How uncomfortable does this thought make me feel?** *Very uncomfortable!*

**How much does this thought interfere with my life?** *It interferes a lot, because it makes me feel depressed and discouraged.*

*Based on the answers to these questions, it is clear that I would benefit from eliminating this thought from my mental repertoire.*

## *Step 2. Dwell on the Thought*

Bring the thought to the level of consciousness and focus on it for several minutes. You might want to do this when you're very relaxed, or combined with a meditation.

## *Step 3. Interrupting the Thought*

When first working with a persistent thought, it's important to stop it by means of a powerful response.

One way to do this is to set a timer for three minutes. Now think about the thought. When the timer goes off, shout "Stop!" You could also raise your hand, snap your fingers, or stand up quickly. Then empty your mind of the thought. Keep your mind blank or focused on a positive thought for at least 30 seconds. If the intrusive thought returns during that time, shout "Stop!" again.

Another way to do this is to tape record yourself shouting "Stop!" at timed intervals. Focus on the thought, then drive it from your mind each time you hear yourself shout "Stop!"

Some people wear a rubber band on their wrist to snap instead of saying "Stop!" when unwanted thoughts come up. Others pinch themselves or dig their nails into the palms of their hands. You will discover what works best for you.

Whenever you realize that you are thinking the unwanted thought, shout "Stop!" After you have done this successfully several times, you can progress to saying "Stop" in a normal tone of voice when unwanted thoughts come up. Eventually you can move on to a whisper, and finally to just saying "Stop" to yourself silently whenever negative thoughts resurface.

## *Step 4. Substitute a Positive or Assertive Thought for the Negative One*

Whenever the negative thought comes up, immediately replace it with an alternative thought. For example, instead of thinking, "I will have a deep depression and need hospitalization," replace it with, "I am feeling fine."

Stopping a thought takes time and patience. But, gradually, you will notice that the thought recurs less and less frequently.



## Exercise: Thought Stopping

**Bothersome Thought:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Is the thought realistic or unrealistic?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Is the thought productive or counterproductive?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Is the thought easy or hard to control?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How uncomfortable does this thought make me feel?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How much does this thought interfere with my life?** \_\_\_\_\_

Based on the answers to the above questions, do you still feel that this is an appropriate thought to stop? If your answer is no, choose another thought and begin the process again.

**Bring the thought to consciousness and focus on it for several minutes. How did that feel?** \_\_\_\_\_

Working with either a timer or a recording, focus on the thought and then interrupt it by shouting "Stop!"

- I am going to use a timer to alert me when to shout "Stop!"
- I'll use a recording of my own voice that says "Stop!"
- I'll raise my hand when I shout "Stop!"
- I'll snap my fingers when I shout "Stop!"
- I'll stand up when I shout "Stop!"

You can use all or one of these strategies to reinforce your cognitive-behavioral change. Repeat this process until you feel ready to move on to the next step. Then interrupt the thought without using a timer or recording. Progress from shouting, to saying, to whispering, and, finally, thinking the word "Stop." **How did this work for you?** \_\_\_\_\_

**When you feel ready, substitute a positive or assertive thought for the intrusive one.**  
*The positive or assertive thought I will substitute is:* \_\_\_\_\_

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When you have become proficient at this technique, you can use it to eliminate other obsessive self-doubts, fears, and phobias. You can work on one or several thoughts at a time, whichever feels best to you. Remember to give yourself credit for your success.

## *Examples of Changing Negative Thoughts to Positive Ones*

Many of us have gotten into the habit of thinking in ways that are inaccurate, irrational, and self-defeating. This negative “self-talk” causes unnecessary stress, anxiety, and depression. By examining these negative thoughts and changing them to positive ones, you can make great strides toward improving and stabilizing your moods and enhancing your overall well-being.

Below I’ve listed some commonly held belief patterns of people with mood disorders, followed by suggestions on how these patterns can be changed to have a positive effect on your feelings.

**Negative Thought:** *I will never be well. I will always have problems with depression and/or mania.*

**The Truth:** *There’s no reason why I can’t continue to stay well.*

My mother was in a hospital for 8 years with severe mood swings. For the rest of her life, thirty-seven years, she had only one brief episode, which was quickly brought under control through psychotherapy and short-term drug therapy.

Of people in the study, 82 expressed a belief in finding solutions to their problem with mood swings; 50 people have had times when they felt that their mood swings were over for good (these periods lasted from 1 month to 25 years).

The ways in which people achieved these results include the use of medications, appropriate treatment of medical problems, and a variety of therapies, including stress reduction and relaxation work, exercise, diet, and lifestyle changes. They did it, and you can, too!

One study participant said, “At the present time, my mood has been stabilized for over a year. It would be unrealistic to think it will never happen again, but at the same time, I don’t want the anticipation of another episode to stop me from living and functioning right now. I just live with the security that if and when it happens again, I will handle it—just like before.’ I have established a solid support system.”

**If “I will never be well” is part of your negative self-talk, write thoughts you can use to change that negative thought pattern to thoughts that are more positive:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Negative Thought:** *I am not worth anything.*

Low self-esteem plagues those of use who have experienced mood disorders. Recurring bouts of debilitating depression, sometimes countered with manic extremes, including bizarre behavior, make it difficult for people with mood disorders to maintain a positive self-image.

**The Truth:** *I have a great deal of value.*

To really get this one refutation programmed into your brain, spend some time reading books on positive thinking (see the Resources List).

**Write here some personal positive statement of your value:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Negative Thought:** *I have never accomplished anything.*

**The Truth:** *I've already accomplished a great deal.*

Give yourself some credit! Take a few moments for some serious and honest thought about your achievements so far.

**Make a list of your accomplishments.** I'm providing plenty of space, as people with mood disorders tend to have high levels of achievement! You can use additional pages if you need to. Be sure to include all educational and personal achievements. Be true to yourself and give yourself a break. Don't minimize anything you have accomplished.

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Make photocopies of the list of your accomplishments, and post it in prominent places. Let it be a reminder of your self-worth whenever you are feeling as if you have never accomplished anything.

**Negative Thought:** *I will never accomplish anything.*

**The Truth:** *I have the capacity to accomplish just about whatever I want to, with the exception of a few physical restrictions.*

**What is it that you would like to accomplish in your life? What are your dreams and goals? Write them here.** Use additional pages if you need to. \_\_\_\_\_

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Read your list of dreams and goals over again and again. As you reread it, you will begin taking positive steps toward the achievement of these goals. (Fantasy is a powerful tool toward the fulfillment of your hopes and dreams!) If you have setbacks, just pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and get going again.

**Negative Thought:** *I cannot allow myself to make mistakes.*

**The Truth:** *Everyone makes mistakes.*

We don't like to make mistakes, but we all do. And it's not the end of the world. No one is perfect. It doesn't mean that you are stupid or worthless if you make a mistake. It just means that you made a mistake. Acknowledge your errors, then do whatever you can to learn from them.

**Negative Thought:** *In order for me to be happy, everyone must love and approve of me.*

**The Truth:** *It would be great if I could be loved and approved of by everyone, but it just isn't the way the world works.*

Just as you don't love or approve of everyone you meet, it's not possible for everyone to love and approve of you. It doesn't mean that you are bad or that anything is wrong with you. Tastes are so diverse that no one can please everyone. The important thing is to make sure that you love and approve of yourself.

**Negative Thought:** *I want to die.*

This thought is all too common among people when they are depressed. I know that I have said this over and over again in my mind, literally hundreds of times a day. That is what my mother repeated constantly when she was in a deep depression. I've learned to stop this negative thought before it even surfaces.

**The Truth:** *I want to live and be happy.*

Replace that old, worn-out "I want to die" with "I choose life."

Take it from me, this works! I really had to work at changing this debilitating negative thought, but I have succeeded in committing myself to living, no matter what comes up.

For yourself, your loved ones, and the world, for all you can achieve, give yourself the gift of life. I have and I'm glad. Even when the going is really rough, and I don't feel like I can get out of bed one more time, I choose life. In the next moment my daughter could poke her head around the corner, a good friend could call, the swallows could return, or a beautiful sunset could paint the sky. Take a chance on what's around the corner and choose life.

*I choose life.*

**Negative Thought:** *There is no reason for me to go on living.*

**The Truth:** *There are many compelling reasons why I should live my life.* Your reasons might include your loving feelings for family members, friends, and pets; flowers, trees, the ocean, the mountains; your enjoyment of skiing, skating, walking, making love, eating wonderful food; the pleasure you get from movies, television shows, art, music, and travel; the satisfaction you get from artistic and productive work, from helping others, from communicating meaningfully with others, or communing with Nature or God.

**Make a list of the reasons why you should live:** \_\_\_\_\_

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For Christmas, my three granddaughters gave me an enlargement of a wonderful picture of them all laughing, mounted on brightly colored poster board and surrounded by their hand prints. I have it displayed on a wall where I see it constantly. It gives me such a lift, I smile every time I see it. It reminds me of how much I want to go on living.

*I'm going to fill my living space with the following reminders of why I should live:* \_\_\_\_\_

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*This is my personal plan for how I'm going to spend more time with people I enjoy:* \_\_\_\_\_

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*This is how I plan to make more time in my life to do the things I like to do:* \_\_\_\_\_

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## *Further Positive Comebacks for Negative Thoughts*

The following negative thoughts were expressed by people at a mood disorders support group I belong to. The group helped everyone develop positive thoughts to counter their negative ones. (I highly recommend this activity for support groups.)

**Negative Thought:** *I am lazy.*

**Positive Thought:** *I am a hard worker when I am feeling well.*

**Negative Thought:** *I don't have any goals.*

**Positive Thought:** *I am developing some goals for myself.*

**Negative Thought:** *I am unmotivated.*

**Positive Thought:** *I am a highly motivated person.*

**Negative Thought:** *I am an outsider.*

**Positive Thought:** *I am part of the group.*

**Negative Thought:** *I am unlovable.*

**Positive Thought:** *I am a lovable person.*

**Negative Thought:** *I am dysfunctional.*

**Positive Thought:** *I'm having a hard time right now, but I'm working hard at getting better.*

**Negative Thought:** *I don't have any social skills.*

**Positive Thought:** *I'm developing my social skills.*

**Negative Thought:** *I'm getting older and yet I'm not where I should be in life.*

**Positive Thought:** *Everyone is getting older, and everyone develops at a different rate. I'm just where I should be.*

**Negative Thought:** *I am all alone in the world.*

**Positive Thought:** *I know and love many people.*

**Negative Thought:** *I will always be alone.*

**Positive Thought:** *I might continue to be alone, but there are many people who are precious to me.*

**Negative Thought:** *I have wasted many years of my life.*

**Positive Thought:** *I have done many good things during my life.*

**Negative Thought:** *I am hurting my body by smoking and drinking.*

**Positive Thought:** *I'm working hard on giving up smoking and drinking, and I know that I will soon achieve my goal.*

**Negative Thought:** *I am getting older and I look like it.*

**Positive Thought:** *Everyone gets older—but happiness is the best cosmetic. The happier I feel, the better I'll look.*

**Negative Thought:** *I will never succeed, so why bother trying?*

**Positive Thought:** *I will succeed—that is why I am trying so hard.*

**Negative Thought:** *What's the use?*

**Positive Thought:** *Life is worthwhile.*

**Negative Thought:** *Even if I do succeed, I am going to die anyway.*

**Positive Thought:** *Of course, everyone dies; but I might as well try to make the best of my time while I'm alive.*

**Negative Thought:** *Nobody loves me.*

**Positive Thought:** *Many people love me.*

**Negative Thought:** *I have leaned on those who love me so much that they are sick to death of me.*

**Positive Thought:** *There is joy in giving as well as receiving. Those who help me do so because they want to. I'm going to give back as much as I can—but first I have to get well.*

**Negative Thought:** *I drag people down.*

**Positive Thought:** *I often make people feel better by being an understanding and sympathetic friend.*

**Negative Thought:** *I am a burden.*

**Positive Thought:** *I have lots to give.*

**Negative Thought:** *I am unable to love.*

**Positive Thought:** *I know that I can love.*

**Negative Thought:** *I will never be independent again.*

**Positive Thought:** *I've been independent before, and I'll be independent again.*

**Negative Thought:** *I will always be like this. It will not end. It's hopeless.*

**Positive Thought:** *People with the kinds of problems I have do get well, and they stay well for long periods of time.*

**Negative Thought:** *What's the point?*

**Positive Thought:** *I'm alive, so I have plenty of gifts. It's my responsibility to make the most of them.*

**Negative Thought:** *I blew my college education by getting fired.*

**Positive Thought:** *I only got fired. I did not blow my education. I'll get another job. Nothing can take away the things I learned in college.*

**Negative Thought:** *I don't deserve to live.*

**Positive Thought:** *I deserve to live.*

**Negative Thought:** *Why bother? Whatever I do, it won't work.*

**Positive Thought:** *Sometimes the things I do work out well.*

**Negative Thought:** *How can I succeed at suicide?*

**Positive Thought:** *How can I succeed at life?*

**Negative Thought:** *I am not as well equipped as everyone else to function in the world.*

**Positive Thought:** *I am just as well equipped as everyone else to function in the world. I have a good mind and a good heart.*

**Negative Thought:** *I am weak-willed; I have a character defect.*

**Positive Thought:** *I am basically a strong person. I am just having a hard time right now.*

**Negative Thought:** *Why me? Why am I afflicted?*

**Positive Thought:** *Everyone has problems. We just do the best we can with them.*

**Negative Thought:** *It's my fault I'm depressed. If I tried harder, I wouldn't have mood swings.*

**Positive Thought:** *Mood swings aren't anyone's fault, not any more than the flu or cancer. I'm doing the best I can to get well.*

## Affirmations

Many people have made dramatic changes in their lives through the creation and repetition of positive affirmations. An affirmation is a statement that describes the way you would want your life (or you) to be at its very best. Although this notion may seem a bit simplistic, it really works: repeated over and over again, affirmations can have tremendous power to act as a very positive force in your life.

I have used affirmations successfully for many years, as have many people in the study. It has been interesting for me to review old affirmations from time to time to see how my life has changed. Some affirmations that were appropriate for me several years



ago are not even necessary now, and I have replaced them with new ones. This is an ongoing process. I keep my affirmations in a journal by my bedside and review them daily, updating them as appropriate. I keep extra lists of them handy, one in my pocketbook to review when I am waiting for an appointment and another near my exercise bicycle for me to read while I'm pedaling.

## *Rules for Creating Affirmations*

1. **When developing an affirmation, always use the present tense.** For example: *I am healthy, I am well, I have a good job*, as if the condition already existed.
2. **Use only positive words in your affirmations.** For example, *happy, peaceful, loving, enthusiastic, warm*. Avoid using negative terms such as *worried, frightened, upset, tired, bored*, even if you're negating them (don't say "I'm not upset"; say instead, "I feel calm").
3. **Use the first person:** *I, me*, or your own name.
4. **The affirmation should create a strong picture of you, successful in whatever way you desire, right now.**
5. **Keep your affirmation short and simple.**
6. **If you have a religious or spiritual faith, use your faith to enhance this process.** For example, "I trust the perfection and goodness of the universe."

## *Examples of Positive Affirmations*

*I think and act with confidence.*

*I am strong and powerful.*

*I fully accept myself as I am.*

*I have many accomplishments to my credit.*

*I am healthy and energetic.*

*I deserve the time and space to heal.*

*I have all the resources I need to do what I want to in my life.*

*I am loved by many people.*

*I am a very valuable person.*

*I am safe and protected.*

*I am effective and efficient in stressful situations.*

*I am peaceful and serene at all times.*

*My relationships are happy and fulfilling.*

*I am in charge of my life.*

*I look and feel wonderful.*

*I express myself easily and comfortably.*

*I choose life.*

