A Pocket Guide to Challenge Cognitive Distortions



## Mental Filter

What It Is: Focusing only on the negative, filtering out the positive. This can make accomplishments feel invisible.

Example: "I got one negative comment - the whole presentation was terrible."

Reflection What positive details are Prompt: you ovorlooking? Can both good and bad things exist in the same experience?

Try This: List 3 things that went right - no matter how small.

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# All-Or-Nothing Thinking

What It Is: Also known as black-and-white thinking - believing something has to be perfect or it's a complete failure.

Example: "I didn't follow my diet today, so I've totally failed. I might as well give up."

Reflection Where in your life do
Prompt: you notice this type of
thinking? What might a more
balanced perspective sound
like?

Try This: Ask yourself: "Is there a middle ground here?"

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## Magnification & Minimization

What It Is: Exaggerating the importance of mistakes or problems (magnification) or downplaying your strengths and achievements (minimization).

Example: "I tripped over my words the whole presentation -I ruined the whole thing."

Reflection Are you blowing this out Prompt: of proportion? Or minimizing your success?

Try This: Ask: "If my friend said this, would I agree?"

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# Disqualifying the Positive

What It Is: Differs from Mental Filter in its emphasis on rejecting the positive because it "doesn't count."

Example: "They only said I did well to be nice — I actually messed up."

Reflection What positive details are Prompt: you dismissing?

Try This: Practice saying: "Thank you. I appreciate that."

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## Jumping to Conclusions

What It Is: Making assumptions without evidence - either by mind-reading (assuming we know what others are thinking) or fortune-telling (predicting a negative outcome).

Example: "They didn't text back - they must be mad at me."

Reflection When have you assumed the Prompt: worst without proof? How did that impact your mood or behavior?

Try This: Ask: "What evidence do I really have for this belief?"

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# Catastrophizing

What It Is: Seeing a situation's smallest downside as the possible end or cause of a worst case scenario.

Example: "If I mess this up, I'll lose everything."

Reflection Are you imagining the Prompt: worst instead of the most likely?

Try This: Ask: "What's the best case? Worst case? Most realistic case?"

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## Should and Must Statements

What It Is: Using harsh, absolute language with yourself or others.

Example: "I should always be productive" or "People must never be late"

Reflection Where do your 'shoulds' Prompt: come from - are they helping or harming you?

Try This: Replace 'should' with 'could' and see how it feels.

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## Personalization

What It Is: Blaming ourselves for things out of our control, or taking unrelated things personally.

Example: "My friend canceled - I must have done something wrong."

Reflection Is this truly your fault?
Prompt: What else could explain it?

Try This: Ask: "Am I assuming too much responsibility?"

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