



Thinking Traps

Ten common unhelpful thinking styles. Everyone falls into them sometimes, and noticing one can help loosen its grip. When you spot a trap, try the question beside it.

Not every hard thought is a trap. Sometimes a worry is accurate: you may be facing unfair treatment, real limits from a health condition, or a situation that isn't safe. If no trap fits, that's useful to know. The goal is to see the situation fairly and choose a helpful response, not to prove the feeling wrong.

All-or-Nothing Thinking

Seeing things in black and white, with no room for anything in between.

"If it isn't perfect, I've failed."

Try asking: Where's the middle ground?

Mental Filter

Zooming in on one negative detail and tuning out everything else.

"That one stumble ruined the whole thing."

Try asking: What am I leaving out?

Jumping to Conclusions

Mind reading (assuming you know what others think) or fortune telling (predicting the worst).

"No reply — they must be upset with me."

Try asking: What's the actual evidence?

Emotional Reasoning

Treating a feeling as proof that something is true.

"I feel guilty, so I must have done wrong."

Try asking: Is this a feeling or a fact?

Labeling

Summing up yourself or someone else with a single harsh word.

"I'm such a failure."

Try asking: Would I say this to a friend?

"Should" Statements

Rigid rules about how you or others must act, which breed guilt or resentment.

"I should be over this by now."

Try asking: Who made this rule?

Overgeneralizing

Drawing a sweeping conclusion from one event — always, never, everyone.

"This always happens to me."

Try asking: Is it really always?

Discounting the Positive

Brushing off good things as flukes, or as not really counting.

"They were only being nice."

Try asking: What if it does count?

Catastrophizing & Minimizing

Blowing problems out of proportion, or shrinking your own strengths.

"One mistake and it's all over."

Try asking: What's most likely to happen?

Personalization & Blame

Taking the blame for things outside your control — or putting it all on others.

"It's my fault they're in a bad mood."

Try asking: What else played a part?



Notice, evaluate, and respond

Use this when a thought knocks you off balance. There are no wrong answers.

Name _____

Date _____

1 The situation What happened? Where were you, and who was there?

2 Catch the thought What went through your mind? How much do you believe it (0–100%)? ____

3 Notice the feeling Name each emotion and rate it (0–100).

4 Spot a trap, if there is one Check any that fit (see page 1), or “none.”

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|--|---|---|
| ☐ All-or-nothing | ☐ Mental filter | ☐ Jumping to conclusions |
| ☐ Emotional reasoning | ☐ Labeling | ☐ “Should” statements |
| ☐ Overgeneralizing | ☐ Discounting the positive | ☐ Catastrophizing / minimizing |
| ☐ Personalization / blame | ☐ None of these fit | ☐ Not sure |

Sometimes a concern is realistic. That’s worth knowing, and step 6 can help you decide what to do about it.

5 Check it Look at the facts as if you were a fair-minded friend.

EVIDENCE THAT SUPPORTS THE THOUGHT

EVIDENCE THAT DOESN'T FIT

6 Respond to it A fair, balanced view — not just a positive one.

If the concern is realistic: what would help? A practical step, support from someone, an accommodation, or a boundary?

7 Check in again

How strong is the feeling now? (0–100) _____ One small next step: _____

It’s okay if the rating hasn’t dropped much. Success means seeing the situation more clearly and choosing a helpful next step, not making the feeling disappear.