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Exaggerated or irrational thought pattern "Thinking errors" redirects here. For faulty reasoning, see Fallacy. A cognitive distortion is a thought that causes a person to perceive reality inaccurately due to being exaggerated or irrational. Cognitive distortions are involved in the onset or perpetuation of psychopathological states, such as depression and anxiety.[1] According to Aaron Beck's cognitive model, a negative outlook on reality, sometimes called negative schemas (or schemata), is a factor in symptoms of emotional dysfunction and poorer subjective well-being. Specifically, negative thinking patterns reinforce negative emotions and thoughts.[2] During difficult circumstances, these distorted thoughts can contribute to an overall negative outlook on the world and a depressive or anxious mental state. According to hopelessness theory and Beck's theory, the meaning or interpretation that people give to their experience importantly influences whether they will become depressed and whether they will experience severe, repeated, or long-duration episodes of depression.[3] Challenging and changing cognitive distortions is a key element of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). For broader coverage of this topic, see Intrapersonal communication. Cognitive comes from the Medieval Latin cognitīvus, equivalent to Latin cognit(us), 'known'.[4] Distortion means the act of twisting or altering something out of its true, natural, or original state.[5] In 1957, American psychologist Albert Ellis, though he did not know it yet, would aid cognitive therapy in correcting cognitive distortions and indirectly helping David D. Burns in writing The Feeling Good Handbook. Ellis created what he called the ABC Technique of rational beliefs. The ABC stands for the activating event, beliefs that are irrational, and the consequences that come from the beliefs. Ellis wanted to prove that the activating event is not what caused the emotional behavior or the consequences, but the beliefs and how the person irrationally perceives the events which aid the consequences.[6] With this model, Ellis attempted to use rational emotive behavior therapy (REBT) with his patients, in order to help them "reframe" or reinterpret the experience in a more rational manner. In this model, Ellis explains it all to his clients, while Beck helps his clients figure this out on their own.[7] Beck first started to notice these automatic distorted thought processes when practicing psychoanalysis, while his patients followed the rule of saying anything that comes to mind. He realized that his patients had irrational fears, thoughts, and perceptions that were automatic. Beck began noticing his automatic thought processes that he knew his patients had but did not report. Most of the time the thoughts were biased against themselves and very erroneous.[8] Beck believed that the negative schemas developed and manifested themselves in the perspective and behavior. The distorted thought processes led to focusing on degrading the self, amplifying minor external setbacks, experiencing other's harmless comments as ill-intended, while simultaneously seeing self as inferior. Inevitably cognitions are reflected in their behavior with a reduced desire to care for oneself, reduced desire to seek pleasure, and finally give up. These exaggerated perceptions, due to cognition, feel real and accurate because the schemas, after being reinforced through the behavior, tend to become "knee-jerk" automatic and do not allow time for reflection.[9] This cycle is also known as Beck's cognitive triad, focused on the theory that the person's negative schema applied to the self, the future, and the environment.[10] In 1972, psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, and cognitive therapy scholar Aaron T. Beck published Depression: Causes and Treatment.[11] He was dissatisfied with the conventional Freudian treatment of depression because there was no empirical evidence for the success of Freudian psychoanalysis. Beck's book provided a comprehensive and empirically supported theoretical model for depression—its potential causes, symptoms, and treatments. In Chapter 2, titled "Symptomatology of Depression", he described "cognitive manifestations" of depression, including low self-evaluation, negative expectations, self-blame and self-criticism, indecisiveness, and distortion of the body image.[11] Beck's student David D. Burns continued research on the topic. In his book Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy, Burns described personal and professional anecdotes related to cognitive distortions and their elimination.[12] When Burns published Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy, it made Beck's approach to distorted thinking widely known and popularized.[13][14] Burns sold over four million copies of the book in the United States alone. It was a book commonly "prescribed" for patients with cognitive distortions that have led to depression. Beck approved of the book, saying that it would help others alter their depressed moods by simplifying the extensive study and research that had taken place since shortly after Beck had started as a student and practitioner of psychoanalytic psychiatry. Nine years later, The Feeling Good Handbook was published, which was also built on Beck's work and includes a list of ten specific cognitive distortions that will be discussed throughout this article.[15] Not to be confused with logical fallacy. Examples of some common cognitive distortions seen in depressed and anxious individuals. People may be taught how to identify and alter these distortions as part of cognitive behavioural therapy. John C. Gibbs and Granville Bud Potter propose four categories for cognitive distortions: self-centered, blaming others, minimizing-mislabeling, and assuming the worst.[16] The cognitive distortions listed below are categories of negative self-talk.[15][17][18][19] Main article: Splitting (psychology) The "all-or-nothing thinking distortion" is also referred to as "splitting"[20] "black-and-white thinking"[2] and "polarized thinking".[21] Someone with the all-or-nothing thinking distortion looks at life in black and white categories.[15] Either they are a success or a failure; either they are good or bad; there is no in-between. According to one article, "Because there is always someone who is willing to criticize, this tends to collapse into a tendency for polarized people to view themselves as a total failure. Polarized thinkers have difficulty with the notion of being 'good enough' or a partial success." [20] Example (from The Feeling Good Handbook): A woman eats a spoonful of ice cream. She thinks she is a complete failure for breaking her diet. She becomes so depressed that she ends up eating the whole quart of ice cream.[15] This example captures the polarized nature of this distortion—the person believes they are totally inadequate if they fall short of perfection. In order to combat this distortion, Burns suggests thinking of the world in terms of shades of gray.[15] Rather than viewing herself as a complete failure for eating a spoonful of ice cream, the woman in the example could still recognize her overall effort to diet as at least a partial success. This distortion is commonly found in perfectionists.[13] Main article: Jumping to conclusions Reaching preliminary conclusions (usually negative) with little (if any) evidence. Three specific subtypes are identified:[citation needed] Inferring a person's possible or probable (usually negative) thoughts from their behaviour and nonverbal communication; taking precautions against the worst suspected case without asking the person. Example 1: A student assumes that the readers of their paper have already made up their minds concerning its topic, and, therefore, writing the paper is a pointless exercise.[19] Example 2: Kevin assumes that because he sits alone at lunch, everyone else must think he is a loser. (This can encourage self-fulfilling prophecy. Kevin may not initiate social contact because of his fear that those around him already perceive him negatively).[22] Predicting outcomes (usually negative) of events. Example: A depressed person tells themselves they will never improve; they will continue to be depressed for their whole life.[15] One way to combat this distortion is to ask, "If this is true, does it say more about me or them?"[23] This section does not cite any sources. Please help improve this section by adding citations to reliable sources. Unourced material may be challenged and removed. (July 2023) (Learn how and when to remove this message) Labelling occurs when someone overgeneralizes the characteristics of other people. Someone might use an unfavorable term to describe a complex person or event, such as assuming that a friend is upset with them due to a late reply to a text message, even though there could be various other reasons for the delay. It is a more extreme form of jumping-to-conclusions cognitive distortion where one presumes to know the thoughts, feelings, or intentions of others without any factual basis. Main article: Emotional reasoning In the emotional reasoning distortion, it is assumed that feelings expose the true nature of things and experience reality as a reflection of emotionally linked thoughts; something is believed true solely based on a feeling. Examples: "I feel stupid, therefore I must be stupid" [24] Feeling fear of flying in planes, and then concluding that planes are dangerous. [15] Blaming is the opposite of personalization. In the blaming distortion, the disproportionate level of blame is placed upon other people, rather than oneself.[15] In this way, the person avoids taking personal responsibility, making way for a "victim mentality". Example: Placing blame for marital problems entirely on one's spouse. [15] In this cognitive distortion, being wrong is unthinkable. This distortion is characterized by actively trying to prove one's actions or thoughts to be correct, and sometimes prioritizing self-interest over the feelings of another person.[2] [[unreliable source?]] In this cognitive distortion, the facts that oneself has about their surroundings are always right while other people's opinions and perspectives are wrongly seen.[27] [[unreliable source?]] Relying on social control to obtain cooperative actions from another person.[2] The underlying assumption of this thinking style is that one's happiness depends on the actions of others. The fallacy of change also assumes that other people should change to suit one's own interests automatically, and/or that it is fair to pressure them to change. It may be present in most abusive relationships in which partners' "visions" of each other are tied into the belief that happiness, love, trust, and perfection would just occur once they or the other person change aspects of their beings.[28] Main articles: Exaggeration and Minimisation (psychology) Giving proportionally greater weight to a perceived failure, weakness or threat, or lesser weight to a perceived success, strength or opportunity, so that the weight differs from that assigned by others, such as "making a mountain out of a molehill". In depressed clients, often the positive characteristics of other people are exaggerated, and their negative characteristics are understated. Catastrophizing is a form of magnification where one gives greater weight to the worst possible outcome, however unlikely, or experiences a situation as unbearable or impossible when it is just uncomfortable. Main article: Labeling theory A form of overgeneralization; attributing a person's actions to their character instead of to an attribute. Rather than assessing the behaviour to be accidental or otherwise extrinsic, one assigns a label to someone or something that is based on the inferred character of that person or thing. Someone who overgeneralizes makes faulty generalizations from insufficient evidence. Such as seeing a "single negative event" as a "never-ending pattern of defeat".[15] and as such drawing a very broad conclusion from a single incident or a single piece of evidence. Even if something had happens only once, it is expected to happen over and over again.[2] Example 1: A person is asked out on a first date, but not a second one. They are distraught as tells a friend, "This always happens to me! I'll never find love!" Example 2: A person is lonely and often spends most of their time at home. Friends sometimes ask them to dinner and to meet new people. They feel it is useless to even try. No one could really like them. And anyway, all people are the same: petty and selfish.[24] One suggestion to combat this distortion is to "examine the evidence" by performing an accurate analysis of one's situation. This aids in avoiding exaggerating one's circumstances.[15] Disqualifying to positive refers to rejecting positive experiences by insisting they "don't count" for some reason or other. Negative belief is maintained despite contradiction by everyday experiences. Disqualifying the positive may be the most common fallacy in the cognitive distortion range; it is often analyzed with "always being right", a type of distortion where a person is in an all-or-nothing self-judgment. People in this situation show signs of depression. Examples include: "I'll never be as good as Jane" "Anyone could have done as well"[15] "They are just congratulating me to be nice"[29] Main article: Selective abstraction Filtering distortions occur when an individual dwells only on the negative details of a situation and filters out the positive aspects.[15] Example: Andy gets mostly compliments and positive feedback about a presentation he has done at work, but he also has received a small piece of criticism. For several days following his presentation, Andy dwells on this one negative reaction, forgetting all of the positive reactions that he had also been given.[15] The Feeling Good Handbook notes that filtering is like a "drop of ink that discolors a beaker of water".[15] One suggestion to combat filtering is a cost-benefit analysis. A person with this distortion may find it helpful to sit down and assess whether filtering out the positive and focusing on the negative is helping or hurting them in the long run.[15] In a series of publications,[30][31][32] philosopher Paul Franceschi has proposed a unified conceptual framework for cognitive distortions designed to clarify their relationships and define new ones. This conceptual framework is based on three notions: (i) the reference class (a set of phenomena or objects, e.g. events in the patient's life), (ii) dualities (positive/negative, qualitative/quantitative, ...), (iii) the taxon system (degrees allowing to attribute properties according to a given duality to the elements of a reference class). In this model, "dichotomous reasoning", "minimization", "maximization" and "arbitrary focus" constitute general cognitive distortions (applying to any duality), whereas "disqualification of the positive" and "catastrophism" are specific cognitive distortions, applying to the positive/negative duality. This conceptual framework posits two additional cognitive distortion classifications: the "omission of the neutral" and the "requalification in the other pole". Cognitive restructuring (CR) is a popular form of therapy used to identify and reject maladaptive cognitive distortions.[33] and is typically used with individuals diagnosed with depression.[34] In CR, the therapist and client first examine a stressful event or situation reported by the client. For example, a depressed male college student who experiences difficulty in dating might believe that his "worthlessness" causes women to reject him. Together, therapist and client might then create a more realistic cognition, e.g., "It is within my control to ask girls on dates. However, even though there are some things I can do to influence their decisions, whether or not they say yes is largely out of my control. Thus, I am not responsible if they decline my invitation." CR therapies are designed to eliminate "automatic thoughts" that include clients' dysfunctional or negative views. According to Beck, doing so reduces feelings of worthlessness, anxiety, and anhedonia that are symptomatic of several forms of mental illness.[35] CR is the main component of Beck's and Burns's CBT.[36] Main article: Narcissistic defences Those diagnosed with narcissistic personality disorder tend, unrealistically, to view themselves as superior, overemphasizing their strengths and understating their weaknesses.[35] Narcissists use exaggeration and minimization this way to shield themselves against psychological pain.[37][38] Main article: Decatastrophizing In cognitive therapy, decatastrophizing or decatastrophizing is a cognitive restructuring technique that may be used to treat cognitive distortions, such as magnification and catastrophizing.[39] commonly seen in psychological disorders like anxiety[34] and psychosis.[40] Major features of these disorders are the subjective report of being overwhelmed by life circumstances and the incapability of accepting them. Main article: Cognitive behavioral therapy § CriticsMain Common criticisms of the diagnosis of cognitive distortion relate to epistemology and the theoretical basis. If the perceptions of the patient differ from those of the therapist, it may not be because of intellectual malfunctions, but because the patient has different experiences. In some cases, depressed subjects appear to be "sadder but wiser".[41] Cognitive bias - Systematic pattern of deviation from norm or rationality in judgment Cognitive dissonance - Mental phenomenon of holding contradictory beliefs Defence mechanism - Unconscious psychological mechanism Delusion - Fixation of holding false beliefs Destabilisation - Attempts to undermine political, military or economic power Emotion and memory - Critical factors contributing to the emotional enhancement effect on human memory Illusion - Distortion of the perception of reality Language and thought - Study of how language influences thought List of cognitive biases List of fallacies Negativity bias - Tendency to give more importance to negative experiences Parataxic distortion - Inclination to skew perceptions of others based on fantasy Rationalization (psychology) - Psychological defense mechanism ^ Helmond, Petra; Overbeek, Geertjan; Brugman, Daniel; Gibbs, John C. (2015). "A Meta-Analysis on Cognitive Distortions and Externalizing Problem Behavior" (PDF). Criminal Justice and Behavior. 42 (3): 245-262. doi:10.1177/0093854814552842. S2CID 146611029. ^ a b c d e f Grohol, John (2009). "15 Common Cognitive Distortions". PsychCentral. Archived from the original on 2009-07-07. {{cite web}}: CS1 maint: bot: original URL status unknown (link) ^ APA PsycNet. psycnet.apa.org. Retrieved 2020-06-29. ^ "Cognitive". Dictionary.com Unabridged (Online). n.d. Retrieved 2020-03-14. ^ "Distortion". Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary. Merriam-Webster. Retrieved 2020-03-14. ^ McLeod, Saul A. (2015). "Cognitive Behavioral Therapy". SimplyPsychology. ^ Ellis, Albert (1957). "Rational Psychotherapy and Individual Psychology". Journal of Individual Psychology. 13: 42. ^ Beck, Aaron T. (1997). "The Past and Future of Cognitive Therapy". Journal of Psychotherapy and Research. 6 (4): 277. PMC 3330473. PMID 9292441. ^ Kovacs, Maria; Beck, Aaron T. (1986). 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Should/Shouldn't Statements...Dr. Albert Ellis (1994) has labeled this...as Must-urbation ... 10. Labeling ... 11. Personalization and Blame[1] ^ Erford, Bradley (2020) [2010]. "Self-Talk". 45 Techniques Every Counselor Should Know. Pearson. p. 130. ISBN 978-0-13-469489-4. Schafer (1999) identified at least 16 different types of negative self-talk, negativizing (i.e., focusing on the negative aspects), awflizing (i.e., perceiving situations as awful), catastrophizing (i.e., perceiving situations as catastrophes), overgeneralizing, minimizing, blaming, perfectionism, musturbation (i.e., perceiving that one 'must' do something), personalizing, judging human worth, control fallacy (i.e., perception that everything is under one's control), polarized thinking (i.e., an all-or-none mentality), being right, fallacy of fairness (i.e., the belief that life should be fair), shoulding (i.e., perceiving that one 'should' do something), and magnifying. ^ a b Tagg, John (1996). 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Adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially. The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms. Attribution — You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. ShareAlike — If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original. No additional restrictions — You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits. You do not have to comply with the license for elements of the material in the public domain or where your use is permitted by an applicable exception or limitation. No warranties are given. The license may not give you all of the permissions necessary for your intended use. For example, other rights such as publicity, privacy, or moral rights may limit how you use the material. 0% (10% found this document useful | 1 vote)137 viewsThe document lists common irrational beliefs and maladaptive assumptions. It identifies 17 categories of distorted automatic thoughts, including mind reading, catastrophizing, labeling, and ...AI-enhanced title and descriptionSaveSaves Lists of irrational thought For Later0%0% found this document useful, undefined0%(10% found this document useful | 1 vote)137 viewsThe document lists common irrational beliefs and maladaptive assumptions. It identifies 17 categories of distorted automatic thoughts, including mind reading, catastrophizing, labeling, and ...AI-enhanced title and description Cognitive distortions are distorted thinking patterns that can negatively impact our mental health. These distorted thoughts often stem from negative thinking, and they can lead to emotional disorders such as depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Rnic et al., 2016).One of the most common cognitive distortions is all-or-nothing thinking, where someone sees things in absolute terms without considering any gray areas or middle ground. This type of distorted thinking can be harmful, leading to extreme thoughts and behaviors, such as feeling like a failure when one makes a mistake or seeing others as completely good or bad.Therapists can use Cognitive Distortions PDF worksheets to help individuals recognize and challenge these distorted thought patterns. These worksheets provide a range of exercises to help individuals become aware of their irrational thinking patterns and how to challenge them.By using Cognitive Distortions PDF worksheets, individuals can develop healthier thinking habits, leading to improved mental health and well-being. They can also more effectively manage their stress and anxiety levels and build better relationships with others. Identifying cognitive distortionsRecognizing our cognitive distortions is essential in understanding and managing them. Some common cognitive distortions include (Harvard Health Publishing, 2022):OvergeneralizationThis is when we apply one negative experience to all aspects of our lives. For example, after a bad job interview, someone may think they are terrible at interviews and will never find a job.Mental filterThis occurs when we focus only on the negative aspects of a situation and ignore any positives. For instance, someone who receives mostly positive feedback on a project may only focus on one negative comment.All-or-nothing thinkingAs mentioned earlier, this is when we see things in black and white without considering any shades of gray. It can lead to extreme thoughts and behaviors, such as giving up completely after making one mistake.Jumping to conclusionsThis distortion involves making assumptions without sufficient evidence. For example, someone may assume their friend is mad at them without asking or finding out.PersonalizationThis occurs when we take responsibility for things not in our control. It can lead to feelings of guilt and shame, even when they are unwarranted.Effects of cognitive distortions on mental healthCognitive distortions can hurt our mental health and well-being. They can lead to negative thought patterns, which can contribute to emotional disorders like depression and anxiety. These distorted thinking patterns can also affect our self-esteem and overall mood (Rnic et al., 2016).For example, someone who constantly engages in all-or-nothing thinking may feel like a failure when imperfect, leading to low self-worth and feelings of inadequacy. This can also perpetuate a never-ending pattern of negative thinking and self-fulfilling prophecies.Cognitive therapy options, cognitive restructuring, and new mood therapy focus on identifying and challenging these distorted thoughts to improve overall mental health. These therapies often use tools like the Beck Depression Inventory to assess thought patterns and track progress.Looking for a relevant resource? Check out our Cognitive Distortions Worksheet Template Click here to view on YouTubeOur free printable Cognitive Distortions PDF template provides exercises for common cognitive distortions such as overgeneralization, mental filtering, and all-or-nothing thinking. Here's how to get started with the worksheet.Step One: Get a copy of the PDFDownload the Cognitive Distortions PDF template using the link provided on this page or from the Carepatron app. You can also get a copy from our resources library.Step Two: Discuss with your clientExplain the various cognitive distortions and how they can lead to irrational thought patterns. Tell your client that this form is designed to help them identify and challenge these distortions.Step Three: Complete the exercisesWork through each exercise with your client, helping them think through each scenario and recognize if their thoughts are distorted. Please encourage them to develop realistic alternatives that could help challenge any irrational beliefs they may have.Step Four: Review the resultsOnce complete, review the worksheet with your client and discuss their findings. Help them understand any patterns they may have observed and guide them on challenging these irrational thoughts in the future.Step Five: Create an action planTogether, create an action plan for managing any distorted thoughts that came up in the future. This should include strategies and techniques such as positive self-talk, guided imagery, or mindfulness exercises to help adjust their thinking when necessary.Step Six: Follow upFollow up with your client to see how they are progressing in challenging their thought patterns. Please encourage them to continue using the Cognitive Distortions PDF as needed.This template is best used as a supplement to other forms of therapy, such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). It can also be adapted to fit any therapeutic approach with minimal effort. Alternatively, you can use this handy Cognitive Distortions Worksheet to Educate clients on the dangers of irrational thinkingThe Cognitive Distortions PDF template is a fantastic tool to educate clients on the dangers of irrational thinking and how they can take steps to challenge them. The template empowers clients to cultivate healthier and more balanced thought patterns by providing practical exercises.Help clients become aware of their thought patternsThis worksheet helps clients become more aware of their thought patterns, allowing them to identify distorted ones and then work to challenge and replace them with more rational thoughts.Develop healthier thinking habitsThis template encourages clients to develop healthier thinking habits by providing evidence-based strategies for challenging cognitive distortions. This can ultimately lead to improved mental health outcomes and a better quality of life.Several forms of therapy can help individuals challenge and change their distorted thinking patterns. Here are two of the most common cognitive therapies (Chand et al., 2023; CBT Cognitive Behavior Therapy, n.d.):Cognitive therapyDeveloped by psychiatrist Aaron T. Beck, this therapy focuses on restructuring an individual's thought patterns through self-awareness and challenging negative thoughts. The goal is to identify and replace distorted thoughts with more realistic and positive ones, leading to improved moods and behaviors.New mood therapyThis form of therapy also utilizes cognitive restructuring techniques but emphasizes the connection between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. By identifying and addressing negative thought patterns, individuals can learn to cope with emotions more healthily. Additionally, this therapy encourages self-compassion and acceptance of one's opinions and feelings.In addition to these therapies, individuals can also work on identifying their opinions and beliefs about themselves and the world around them. This self-awareness can help recognize cognitive distortions and allow for more accurate and positive thinking. The following healthcare professionals can use our free Cognitive Distortions template:Mental health counselorsTherapistsIt is ideal for any healthcare professional working with clients struggling to identify and challenge their cognitive distortions. It can also be used as a standalone tool or incorporated into any therapeutic approach.Chand, S. P., Kuckel, D. P., & Huecker, M. R. (2023, May 23). Cognitive behavior therapy. In StatPearls. StatPearls Publishing. Cognitive Behavior Therapy. (n.d.). CBT for Cognitive Distortions. Health Publishing. (2022, May 4). How to recognize and tame your cognitive distortions. Harvard Health Blog. K., Dozois, D. J., & Martin, R. A. (2016). Cognitive distortions, humor styles, and depression. European Journal of Psychology, 12(3), 348-362. health professionals and individuals seeking to understand better thought patterns can benefit from using sources. Common cognitive distortions include all-or-nothing thinking, mental filters, assigning blame, and control fallacies. These distorted thoughts can hurt an individual's emotions and behaviors.Cognitive distortions PDFs can be used during therapy sessions, as a self-help tool, or as a resource for mental health education. They can also be used with other cognitive therapies, such as mood therapy and cognitive restructuring.