

COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

‘Cognitive distortions’ are a concept taken from Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), another form of talking therapy. Cognitive distortions are thought of as *“irrational thoughts that shape how you see the world, how you feel, and how you act. It’s normal to have these thoughts occasionally, but they can be harmful when frequent or extreme.”*

Although my style of counselling (Person Centred) is not about correcting ‘distorted thinking’, the following cognitive distortions, alongside my leaflet on ‘Cherished Beliefs’, can provide a useful talking point in our counselling sessions. Do any of the following resonate with you?

Magnification and minimization	Exaggerating or minimizing the importance of events. You might believe your own achievements are unimportant or that your mistakes are excessively important.
Catastrophizing	Seeing only the worst possible outcomes of a situation.
Overgeneralization	Making broad interpretations from a single or few events. “I felt awkward during my job interview. I am always so awkward.”
Magical thinking	The belief that thoughts, actions, or emotions influence unrelated situations. "If I hadn't hoped something bad would happen to him, he wouldn't have gotten into an accident."
Personalization	The belief that you are responsible for events outside of your control. “My mum is always upset. She would be fine if I did more to help her.”
Jumping to conclusions	Interpreting the meaning of a situation with little or no evidence.
Mind reading	Interpreting the thoughts and beliefs of others without adequate evidence. “She wouldn’t go on a date with me. She probably thinks I’m ugly.”
Fortune telling	The expectation that a situation will turn out badly without adequate evidence.
Emotional reasoning	The assumption that emotions reflect the way things really are. “I feel like a bad

friend, therefore I must be a bad friend.”

Disqualifying the positive

Recognizing only the negative aspects of a situation while ignoring the positive. You might receive many compliments on an evaluation, but focus on the single piece of negative feedback.

“Should” statements

The belief that things should be a certain way. “I should always be perfect.”

All-or-nothing thinking

Thinking in absolutes such as “always,” “never,” or “every.” “I never do a good enough job on anything.”
