

Handout

Common Thinking Distortions When Angry

1. Magnifying/Catastrophizing

Thinking Pattern

- Enlarging Difficulties
- Minimizing the positive
- Assuming the worst will happen positive of situation.

How to Manage this Thinking Pattern

- Ask self "How bad is it?" Put problem in perspective.
- Look at whole picture. Try to focus on

- Ask self "what are the odds of worst thing happening?"

2. Overgeneralization

Thinking Pattern

- Making sweeping statements based on little evidence
- Use words such as "always, all, every, never, etc

How to Manage this Thinking Pattern

- Ask self "What's the evidence?"
- Avoid absolute words
- Look for exceptions to the rule
- Use specific and accurate descriptions of situations

3. Polarized Thinking

Thinking Pattern

- Seeing everything as awful or great with no middle ground
- Events are either good or bad, people are good or bad, right or wrong

How to Manage this Thinking Pattern

- No black or white judgements
- Think in percentages
- Use more qualifying adjectives - (ie- a little somewhat, a lot). Use phrases that introduce shades of gray

4. Demanding/ Commanding

Thinking Pattern

- Holding arbitrary rules for self and others
- Use of words such as "ought to, have to, should"

How to Manage this Thinking Pattern

- Have more flexible rules
- Instead of shoulds think of "preferences, wants, desires"

5. Inflammatory/ Global Labeling

Thinking Pattern

- Make sweeping negative judgements
- Typical global labels include terms like "stupid, selfish, jerk, liar, loser."
- Anger is fueled by turning the person into Someone bad and worthless

How to Manage this Thinking Pattern

- Focus on the offensive behavior, not the person as whole
- Avoid put downs
- Leave judgements about the person's worth out of it

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6. Misattributions/Single Explanations

Thinking Pattern

- Assuming you know what others are thinking and feeling
- Jump to conclusions about the person's motives
- Focus on single negative explanation rather than different reasons for what happened

How to Manage this Thinking Pattern

- Check it out
- Ask self if there are alternative interpretations
- Ask people for their thoughts about situation and/or their intentions
- Remember you are not a mind reader

7. Blaming

Thinking Pattern

- Belief that other person "did it to you" often on purpose
- Experience sense of helplessness

How to Manage this Thinking Pattern

- Find a way to solve the problem
- Be aware that can only be responsible for own behavior
- Understand that others are doing what what they think is best for them

(Adapted from material from Deffenbacher, J. and McKay, M. Overcoming Situational and General Anger and McKay, M., Davis, M. & Fanning, P. Thoughts and Feelings, Taking Control of Your Moods and Your Life.)