



IDENTIFYING UNHELPFUL THINKING STYLES

Psychologists have identified a number of typical unhelpful thinking styles. Familiarising yourself with them can help you recognise them quickly so you can challenge them and reframe them as more helpful or balanced thoughts.

1. Mental filter	<p>This type of thinking is characterised by ‘tunnel vision’ – looking at only one element of a situation (usually negative) to the exclusion of everything else.</p> <p><i>Example: Having a disagreement about where to park the car has ‘ruined the whole evening.’</i></p>
2. Jumping to conclusions/ mind reading	<p>This style of thinking involves drawing conclusions without considering all of the available evidence.</p> <p><i>Example: ‘My boss wants to speak to me so I must be getting sacked.’</i></p>
3. Taking it personally	<p>Taking it personally involves ignoring other factors that may have contributed to an outcome.</p> <p><i>Example: ‘It’s my fault that we had a bad meal because I chose the restaurant.’</i></p>
4. Catastrophising	<p>This mindset involves imagining the worst possible scenario unfolding and seeing situations as terrible, awful, dreadful and horrible.</p> <p><i>Example: ‘My chest hurts... I must be having a heart attack.’</i></p>
5. Black and white thinking	<p>Also known as ‘all or nothing’ thinking, this approach leaves no room for a middle ground.</p> <p><i>Example: ‘I didn’t get the top mark, so I’m a failure.’</i></p>
6. ‘Shoulds’ and ‘musts’	<p>Thoughts that begin with ‘I/You/They/People should...’ or ‘I/You/They/People must...’ tend to be rigid and inflexible. They put unreasonable demands on others and create unrealistic expectations.</p> <p><i>Example: ‘I must never be upset with my partner’ or ‘She should know better.’</i></p>
7. Over-generalising	<p>This thinking style takes one instance and imposes it on multiple situations. It often includes words such as ‘always,’ ‘never,’ ‘every’ and ‘all.’</p> <p><i>Example: ‘Things never work out for me,’ or ‘I always do the wrong thing.’</i></p>
8. Labelling	<p>This style involves making big statements about ourselves or others on the basis of our behaviour in specific situations.</p> <p><i>Example: ‘I missed the bus... I’m a total idiot.’</i></p>