

Common mindtraps associated with Anxiety

Catastrophising

Catastrophising is a style of thinking that amplifies anxiety. This style of thinking expects disaster or something is worse than it actually is. We may be looking at a situation or challenge that is facing us and then automatically imagine the worst possible thing that could happen. The mind continues this with the what if's game. This is when our minds go on and on about what if this worst case scenario happens. Some of us may do more of this than others. Catastrophising can generally take two forms. The first of these is takes a current situation and gives it a truly negative "spin." The second occurs when we look to the future and anticipate all the things that are going to go wrong.

- Recognise when you're doing it!
- Start recording your negative thoughts to yourself-Write down what happened as objectively as possible, what you thought about the situation, and then what your reaction or behaviours were.
- Change your self-talk to be more forgiving and "hopeful".

Polarised Thinking

Polarized thinking occurs when you believe that there are only right or wrong outcomes or views. When you view things in terms of pure good or pure bad it leads to unachievable standards and high stress levels. Polarized thinking crops up when you find yourself basing your hopes and expectations on a single event or outcome such as a publication accepting your work, wanting everyone to be impressed by you, a specific level of income, or even a certain level of satisfaction.

- Realize that there are a lot of levels between triumph and tragedy, and that most things fall somewhere in between
- Understand that no single accomplishment or failure is going to determine your future happiness.
- Don't expect that your values will never change or that other people will value the same things.
- Try to figure out about what the actual consequences of failure are, and have a plan for dealing with those consequences.

Filtering

Taking the negative details and magnifying them while filtering out all positive aspects of a situation. For instance, a person may pick out a single, unpleasant detail and dwell on it exclusively so that their vision of reality becomes darkened or distorted.

- Learn to evaluate things clearly and with balance.
- Look for positives.
- Resist 'minimalising' your efforts or achievements.
- Acknowledge your own growth by comparing how you have improved or done things better than xxx ago.

Personalisation

Thinking that everything people do or say is some kind of reaction to us. This is the tendency to relate everything around you to yourself. For example, thinking that everything people do or say is some kind of reaction to you. You also compare yourself to others, trying to determine who's smarter, better looking, etc. The underlying assumption is that your worth is in question. You are therefore continually forced to test your value as a person by measuring yourself against others. If you come out better, you get a moment's relief. If you come up short, you feel diminished. The basic thinking error is that you interpret each experience, each conversation, each look as a clue to your worth and value.

Overgeneralisations

Coming to a general conclusion based on a single incident or piece of evidence. If something bad happens once, we expect it to happen over and over again. A person may see a single, unpleasant event as a never-ending pattern of defeat. 'Always' and 'never' are cues that this style of thinking is being utilized. This distortion can lead to a restricted life, as you avoid future failures based on the single incident or event.

Jumping to conclusions

Without individuals saying so, we know what they are feeling and why they act the way they do. In particular, we are able to determine how people are feeling toward us. For example, a person may conclude that someone is reacting negatively toward them and don't actually bother to find out if they are correct. Another example is a person may anticipate that things will turn out badly, and will feel convinced that their prediction is already an established fact.

Attribution Errors

It is a fallacy to believe you can correctly know a person's intent for behaving as they do. Their actions may or may not be deliberate. The person may not even be aware of what they are doing. Their actions may or may not be directed at you. Their actions may have unintended consequences or may result from an accident or chance. We judge others based on behaviour and we judge ourselves based on intent. It is difficult to determine cause when only effect can be observed.

- Taking heed of "consensus" information. If most people behave the same way when put in the same situation, then the situation is more likely to be the cause of the behavior.
- Asking oneself how one would behave in the same situation.
- Looking for unseen causes; specifically, looking for less-salient factors.

Simple steps in challenging Unhelpful thinking

1. **Be aware** of what you are saying to yourself. Ask yourself –
“What is going through my mind?” or
“What is it about this situation that is upsetting me?”

2. **Challenge your thoughts.** Remember, just because you think something, doesn't mean it's true. Ask yourself –
Is this thought helpful?
Am I being realistic?
Would other people in this situation think these thoughts?
Is this an example of one of the common ANTs?

3. Consider the following strategies & ask yourself some of these questions:

Look for evidence:

What's the evidence for and against my thought?
Am I focusing on the negatives and ignoring other information?
Am I jumping to conclusions without looking at all the facts?

Search for alternative explanations:

Are there any other possible explanations?
Is there another way of looking at this?
Am I being too inflexible in my thinking?

Put thoughts into perspective:

Is it as bad as I am making out?
What is the worst that could happen?
How likely is it that the worst will happen?
Even if it did happen, would it really be that bad?
What could I do to get through it?

4. What is a more helpful thought?

What can I say to myself that will help me remain calmer and help me achieve what I want to achieve in this situation?