**Cognitive Errors and Distortions**

*Over-generalizing:* Making wide conclusions based on very little information or very few experiences.

Examples: “Volvos are bad cars” after having only ridden in one Volvo. “I hate the food at that restaurant!” although only having had one meal there.

*All-or-Nothing Thinking* or *Black-and-White Thinking*: Thinking of things in the extremes (e.g., nothing, nobody, never, none, always, everyone, every time).

Examples: “Nobody cares about me.” “I never get to have any fun.” “These things always happen to me.” Going back and forth between “I love him” and “I hate him.”

*Labeling*: Assigning a label to someone or something, and then interpreting all new information according to that label. Example: “I knew Bill Gates in high school. He was a ‘loser’ even then. That’s why Macs are better than PCs.”

*Blaming*: Immediately focusing on whose fault it is when something negative happens. A person can be prone to blaming themselves or others.

Avoiding own responsibility for something by blaming others.

Examples: “I unemployed because of immigrants.” “The tree jumped out in front of my car.”

*Mind-reading*: Making assumptions about what someone else is thinking.

Examples: “She hates me.” “He did it on purpose.” “He said he was fine, but I know he was really angry.”

*Prophesying*: Making assumptions about what will happen and getting upset ahead of time.

Examples: “If I try to speak I will get so nervous I can’t get anything out, and then they will laugh at me, and I will feel so humiliated that I won’t come back to class again.” “I’m not going to ask for permission to go on the trip. Mom will just say no anyway.”

*Catastrophizing:* Focusing on the worst possible part or outcome of something and using it to judge the whole situation. Often overlaps with *prophesying.*

Examples: “I’m not flying! What if the plane crashes?!” “Jack is not home from school yet. What if he is bleeding in a ditch somewhere? Or someone kidnapped him?”

*Awfulizing*: Identifying a task or situation as uncomfortable (e.g., “awful”) and then rule it out as something you are willing to do without weighing the costs and benefits.

Examples: “I can’t go to work, because I can’t take the boss yelling at me” – although very uncomfortable, the person loves the rest of the job and gets paid fairly well, and if thinking it through would consider 5 minutes of being yelled at each day a small price to pay for having this job. “I’m not going home for Christmas. My parents would just be pushing for me to have another kid” - although it is just a few comments amidst otherwise good family time.

*Can't-ing*: Thinking “I can’t” when it is really a matter of priorities or effort. Often overlaps with *awfulizing.*

Example: “I can’t clean my room. It is too messy!” “I can’t eat my green beans.” “I can’t let myself cry.” “I can’t do that - the other guys will ask me to hand in my ‘man-card.’”

*Emotionalizing*: Interpreting the world around you according to your current feelings.

Examples: Feeling sad about a fall-out with a friend and then starting to think about everything wrong in life. Feeling overwhelmed and when someone invites you out for a movie you just focus on how it is yet another thing to fit into your list of tasks to get done.

*Personalizing*: Interpreting what happens around you as being specifically about you.

Examples: “The teacher yelled at me” (when the teacher yelled at the whole class). “The hiring manager didn’t hire me because of my age/gender/ethnic group/tattoos/etc.” (although there were 100 people applying for the job).

*Rationalizing:* Having made an instinctive or emotional decision, but then coming up with good-sounding arguments to justify it as the right choice to oneself or others

Example: “I decided to punch him because he deserves it and because I wanted to teach him to leave others alone” (although he punched because he felt angry and without thinking about it)

*Should-ing*: Applying rules about how things “should” be, without a clear reason why they should be that way. Tends to result in a lot of guilt or limited attention to own needs.

Example: “I was in the hospital undergoing surgery when my brother died. I should have been there with him!”

*Filtering*: Focusing on one side of something, not recognizing important information that does not fit with that side of it.

Example: An employee has a filter that “my boss takes advantage of us.” The boss informs the employees that their yearly vacation is cut by a week, but they get a 10% salary increase and may take up to 4 weeks unpaid time off each year. The employee feels taken advantage of because of the loss of a week’s vacation.

*“Have to” – “choose to” confusion:* Interpreting things as forced choices when they really are prioritizations or good or obvious choices. This results in a feeling that life is controlling us, rather than us making choices that gives us control.

Examples: “I have to go grocery shopping.” “I have to go to work now.” “I have to go to church on Sunday.”

“*Want to” – “impulse to” confusion:* Taking an impulse to do something as meaning that you want to do something.

Examples: “I want to have a donut (although it is ruining my cholesterol).” “I want a drink” (although trying to stop a significant alcohol habit and a drink being the last thing the person should have)

*Discounting/but-ing:* Adding a negative observation to the end of a positive experience, resulting in draining the joy out of it because it implies that the good part did not count. (“But out!” – “but” can usually be replaced more honestly with “and”).

Examples: “I worked at the company for 30 years, starting on the floor and retiring in upper management, but I only got the job at the company because the owner owed my father a favor.” “The whole family was together, and we had turkey, stuffing, and cheesy potatoes. But the potatoes were lumpy.” “I won the chess tournament, but I lost two of my games.” Rev. 05/10/18