

Ten Cognitive Distortions, David Burns MD.

- 1. All-or-nothing thinking.** You see things in extremes of black or white, or absolutes. If your performance falls short of perfection, you see yourself as a total failure.
- 2. Overgeneralisation.** You see a single negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat.
- 3. Mental Filter.** You pick out a negative detail in any situation, and focus on it exclusively and therefore see the whole situation as negative. Like a drop of ink that colours the entire beaker of water.
- 4. Disqualifying the Positive.** You reject positive experiences by insisting they 'don't count' for some reason or other. In this way you maintain a negative belief, even though it's contradicted in your every day experiences.
- 5. Jumping to Conclusions.** You jump to a negative conclusion even though there are no definite facts that convincingly support your conclusion. Two examples of jumping to conclusions are "mind reading" and "fortune telling."
 - Mind Reading.** You make the assumption that other people are looking down on you or thinking badly of you. You're so convinced about this that you don't even bother to check it out and act as if it's true.
 - Fortune Telling.** You anticipate that things will turn out badly, and you are convinced that your prediction is an already established fact.
- 6. Magnification.** You exaggerate your own errors, fears or imperfections. "Oh God – I made a mistake. My life is over!" This is also known as 'catastrophising', turning ordinary negative events into nightmares. Or **Minimisation**, where we shrink our own good qualities until they appear insignificant.
- 7. Emotional Reasoning.** You assume that your negative emotions accurately reflect things the way they really are. You take your emotions as evidence for the truth. "I feel like a failure, therefore I am a failure'.
- 8. Should Statements.** You try to motivate yourself with shoulds and shouldn'ts, as if you had to be whipped and punished before you did anything. The emotional consequence is guilt. And when you direct should statements towards others, you feel anger, frustration and resentment.
- 9. Labeling and mislabeling.** This is an extreme form of overgeneralisation. It involves describing an event or person with language that is highly coloured and emotionally loaded. "I'm a *total loser*". Or "He's a *complete arsehole*."
- 10. Personalisation.** You see yourself as the cause of some negative external event, which you weren't primarily responsible for. This is the mother of guilt!