

NEGATIVE THOUGHTS TRIGGER NEGATIVE FEELINGS

We used to believe that it was depression or anxiety that made people think negatively, but psychologists and psychiatrists have discovered that most people who struggle with anxious or depressed feelings first had negative, pessimistic, distorted thoughts that produced those feelings. People often have completely different reactions to the same situation. For example, John and Jack both heard their supervisor say to their production group, “We have to work harder and be more productive. Too much time is being wasted on trivial matters and we need to get focused.” John thinks, “The supervisor is trying to increase production and make us more efficient. I’d better do my part.” But Jack thinks, “The supervisor is blaming me for our low productivity numbers. I’m worried that I’m going to get fired. He never did like me.” Jack returns to work feeling depressed and anxious and his preoccupation with these negative feelings reduces his productivity. John, after hearing the same statement from the supervisor, returns to work more focused and confident that the situation can improve. The thoughts and interpretations that you make regarding a circumstance have a very strong influence on the feelings that are generated. Psychologists have identified several negative thinking patterns that are common to people who struggle with feelings of anxiety and depression or who feel helpless or out of control in a situation. These distorted thinking patterns trigger the negative feelings and can lead to chronic states of depression and anxiety.

The following distorted thinking patterns are common to people who suffer from depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem, or those who have experienced difficult childhoods, social challenges or marital conflict.

Type of Distortion	Definition
Black or White Thinking	Viewing situations, people, or self as entirely bad or entirely good—nothing in between.
Exaggerating	Making self-critical or other-critical statements that include terms like <i>never</i> , <i>nothing</i> , <i>everything</i> , or <i>always</i> .
Filtering	Ignoring the positive things that occur to and around self but focusing on and accentuating the negative.
Discounting	Rejecting positive experiences as not being important or meaningful.
Catastrophizing	Blowing expected consequences out of proportion in a negative direction.

Type of Distortion	Definition
Judging	Being critical of self or others with a heavy emphasis on the use of <i>should have, ought to, must, have to, and should not have.</i>
Mind reading	Making negative assumptions regarding other people's thoughts and motives.
Forecasting	Predicting events will turn out badly.
Feelings are Facts	Because you feel a certain way, reality is seen as fitting that feeling.
Labeling	Calling self or others a bad name when displeased with a behavior.
Self-blaming	Holding self responsible for an outcome that was not completely under one's control.