

Stress Creating Ways of Thinking

All or Nothing Thinking

Everything is black and white with no shades of grey. For example, if I make one mistake I am a complete loser. There are no absolutes in the universe. The floor is neither totally dirty nor completely clean.

Overgeneralization

Seeing a single negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat or misfortune is overgeneralization. When you catch yourself saying “never”, “always”, and “every”, stop yourself because this is likely overgeneralization. Concluding that one thing that happened to you once will occur over and over again. For example, “Birds always crap on my car”. Well, no... they have done it twice in the last year and a half. Another example, the guy who gets rejected for one date, concludes that this person will never go out with him, or that no one would ever want to date him.

Mental Filter

Picking out a negative detail and dwelling on that exclusively, therefore perceiving that the whole situation is negative. For example, the student who just took an exam is certain that he missed at least 15 of the 100 questions on the test. He thinks exclusively about those questions and concludes he will flunk out of college. He is shocked to get the exam back with a note on it that said “85 out of 100 correct, congratulations on receiving the highest mark in the class.”

Disqualifying the Positive

Transforming neutral or even positive experiences into negative ones. For example, the way we have been conditioned to respond to compliments. You may tell yourself “*they are just being nice*”, or if you say “*it was nothing really*”.

Jumping to Conclusions (Mind reading and fortune telling)

Mind Reading – Assuming you know what people are thinking and/or feeling without any facts to back

it up and not seeking ways to confirm or deny the assumptions. For example, you pass a friend on the street and they look right past you, you conclude they are angry with you and are purposely ignoring you. Fortune Telling – Making a negative prediction and then convincing yourself it’s a fact. It’s as if you have a crystal ball that foretold only misery for you. For example, a woman repeatedly told herself during anxiety attacks, “*I’m going to pass out or go crazy*”. These predictions were unrealistic because she had never once passed out (or gone crazy!) in her entire life.

Magnification and Minimization

Magnification or Catastrophizing – often occurs when you look at your own errors, fears, imperfections, and exaggerate their importance. For example: “*Oh my – I made a mistake. How terrible! How awful! My reputation is ruined!*” You are looking at your faults through the end of the binoculars that makes them look gigantic and grotesque. Minimization – for example, minimizing the importance or magnitude of your strengths.

Should-ing all over yourself

Trying to motivate yourself by saying “*I should do this*” or “*I must do that*”. We direct these shoulds either inward or outward. For example, I’m 30 years old, I shouldn’t get nervous when I speak to people I don’t know (inward). When you direct this shoulding inward, you will often feel shame, guilt, etc. In another example, “*People who work in a helping role should be empathic*” (outward). When you direct this outward, you will often feel frustrated because you can’t control others’ actions, emotions, etc.

Labelling and Mislabelling

Personal labelling (an extreme form of over-generalization) involves creating a negative self image based on your errors. There is a good chance you are doing this if when talking about your mistakes, you begin your sentences with “*I’m a ...*”

People are so complex that it is not possible to define yourself in such narrow terms. For example would you define yourself as “a breather” just because you breathe?

Mislabelling involves describing an event with words that are inaccurate and emotionally heavily loaded. For example, “*I’m a pig*”.

Personalization

Assuming responsibility for negative events you have no control over. For example, a mother’s child is not doing well in school and she tells herself “*I’m a bad mother*”.

Want more information?

The Counselling Department and the Academic Success Centre are your best sources for advice and information on issues related to learning, studying, time management, and academic performance.

Workshops on learning, studying, etc., are offered regularly each semester by the Counselling Department. Please contact Student Services at Abbotsford - 604-854-4528 (B 214) or Chilliwack - 604-795-2808 (A 1318) to make an appointment.

Study Skills Tip Sheets providing information on many learning and time management topics, as well as writing and referencing, are available free to students. The complete range of Study Skills Tip Sheets is available on-line at www.ufv.ca/counselling/study/.