



What you see isn't always what you get

When you're dealing with difficult moments, it can be tough not to feel overwhelmed by negative self-talk – or, the internal train of thoughts you have about yourself. Your thoughts might tell you that you just need to “get over it.” That's perfectly understandable! It's normal.

Part of improving that train of thoughts is identifying the thoughts that might be more harmful and negative than you realize. Those more harmful thoughts are called “cognitive distortions,” which are thoughts that may mess up what you believe and how you feel about yourself.

The same way you see yourself distorted in a fun-house mirror is how your thoughts can get distorted inside your head. Think of these cognitive distortions as “thinking mistakes.” Identifying these “thinking mistakes” can help you realize when your thoughts aren't being helpful. Remember, thoughts are just that – thoughts! They don't have to control your actions.

Here are some examples of “thinking mistakes” you may or may not know.



All-or-nothing thinking

This way of thinking makes you see things as either one way or another.

For example, if you do poorly on a test, you believe you're a failure, when in reality, most situations are more complicated than that. There's usually an alternative mindset.



Negative filtering

This way of thinking filters out all the positive parts of a situation.

For example, let's say you get a low score on a test, but you still showed some improvement. Despite this, you feel your whole day is ruined and the low score becomes all you can think about.



Catastrophizing

This way of thinking CONVINCES you that the worst possible outcome will happen.

For example, a new crush doesn't text you back so you assume they must not ever want to talk to you.



“Should” statements

This way of thinking makes you believe you SHOULD have done something in order to achieve your goals.

For example, “I SHOULD have aced that test.” This way of thinking can make you feel frustrated if you don't complete what you put in your “should” statements. They

might seem harmless, but they can be stressful, especially if your brain rolls them around over and over.

In the next exercise, you'll write and illustrate a story of a disagreement between two friends: the cat and the mouse. Let's get creative!

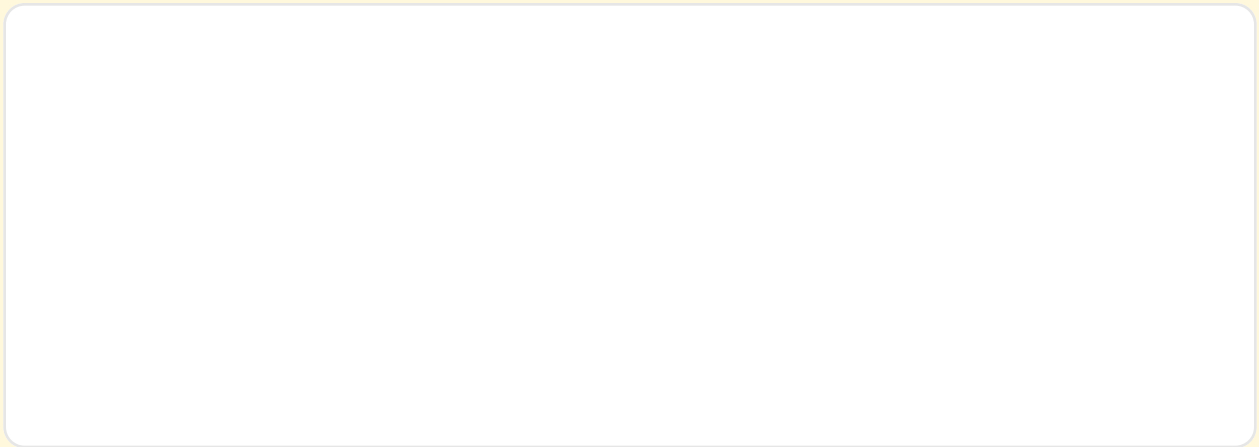
☆ Drawing Activity

STEP 1

Draw the cat and mouse. Imagine they're having an argument, what is it about? Is the mouse catastrophizing the cat will eat him? Or does the cat just want a friend? This is your story so you get to decide.

STEP 2

Were there any moments when either one accidentally made some "thinking mistakes?" Did they make any "thinking mistakes" about each other, about themselves, or about the situation?



The purpose of this activity is to grow your personal understanding of "thinking mistakes" and how to identify a few of them.

Identifying is the first step to working through these thoughts. Remember – thoughts aren't facts.

They're just thoughts, which come and go. It's okay to think about a lot of different things. Just do your best to remember that your thoughts can change – AND you can change them.