



# UNHELPFUL THOUGHT PATTERNS

## THE DIRTY DOZEN

We sometimes view people, situations, and events in ways that are not fully objective or accurate. Instead of 20/20 vision, it's as though we are wearing eyeglasses that are changing what we see. These eyeglasses can cause great suffering, because most of the time we are not aware we are wearing them. We all tend to assume the way we are seeing things is the objective truth, and we frequently fail to acknowledge that there are other possible interpretations of the situation or ways of thinking about ourselves.

This information sheet describes the dirty dozen of unhelpful thought patterns that are often associated with anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges. As you read through the list, check off the extent you notice each thought pattern in your day-to-day life. Many of these patterns overlap with one another and are not meant to be seen as distinct categories.

### 1 PROBABILITY OVERESTIMATION

Assuming that something bad will happen when the facts indicate the actual probability is low.

*"The plane is going to crash," or "I have a headache, it must be a brain tumour."*

- Not Like Me
- A Little Like Me
- A Lot Like Me

### 2 CATASTROPHIZING

Blowing the consequences of something out of proportion.

*"I'm five minutes late; this is terrible!" or "My pain is bad today; I'm never going to get better."*

- Not Like Me
- A Little Like Me
- A Lot Like Me

### 3 FORTUNE TELLING

Assuming that you know what will happen in the future.

*"His plan won't work," or "I know I won't have a good time at the party."*

- Not Like Me
- A Little Like Me
- A Lot Like Me

### 4 OVERGENERALIZATION

Making sweeping generalizations, or being overly broad in the conclusions you draw. These can be related to particular situations and/or to your general worldview.

*"The world is a dangerous place," or "People cannot be trusted."*

- Not Like Me
- A Little Like Me
- A Lot Like Me

### 5 MIND READING

Assuming that you know what someone else is thinking or feeling in the absence of credible information or evidence.

*"She's disappointed in me," or "He thinks I'm stupid."*

- Not Like Me
- A Little Like Me
- A Lot Like Me

### 6 ALL-OR-NOTHING THINKING

Seeing things in binary or black-and-white terms.

*"If I'm not perfect, I have failed," or "There is a right way and a wrong way to all situations."*

- Not Like Me
- A Little Like Me
- A Lot Like Me

## 7 OVERPERSONALIZATION

Taking responsibility for a situation when we had limited control over it. Discounting other factors and people who were involved.

*"It's all my fault that my team didn't win," or "My child scored poorly on the exam; I need to make sure that doesn't happen again."*

- Not Like Me
- A Little Like Me
- A Lot Like Me

## 8 SHOULD AND MUST STATEMENTS

Applying high standards or rigid rules to yourself or others.

*"I must remember everyone's names," or "That plane should be on time."*

- Not Like Me
- A Little Like Me
- A Lot Like Me

## 9 MENTAL FILTER

Seeing only part of a situation and overlooking the rest.

*You teach a course; at the end, you receive two critical pieces of feedback among dozens of positive reviews. Focusing exclusively on the bad reviews, you conclude "I'm such a bad teacher".*

- Not Like Me
- A Little Like Me
- A Lot Like Me

## 10 LABELLING

An extreme form of overgeneralization. Assigning character labels to yourself or others.

*"They're such an idiot," or "I'm a loser."*

- Not Like Me
- A Little Like Me
- A Lot Like Me

## 11 EMOTIONAL REASONING

Using your emotions as the sole source of evidence that something is true.

*"I'm afraid of that dog, therefore it must be dangerous," or "I feel guilty, therefore I must have done something wrong."*

- Not Like Me
- A Little Like Me
- A Lot Like Me

## 12 DISQUALIFYING THE POSITIVE

Downplaying or discounting good things that have happened.

*"My supervisor complimented my presentation, but she's just being nice," or "I won the competition, but that's just because everyone else was having an off day."*

- Not Like Me
- A Little Like Me
- A Lot Like Me

## CONGRATULATIONS!

Now that you have reviewed the dirty dozen and identified your most common patterns, you are well on your way to being able to notice and change these unhelpful ways of thinking, moving towards more balanced thoughts.

## ANXIETY RESOURCES AVAILABLE THROUGH TALL TREE

**Tall Tree** offers a range of services to help people with anxiety. Our exceptional team of mental health professionals offer one-time workshops, group courses, and 1-on-1 therapy. We also offer yoga, meditation, nature-based therapy, personal training, and nutrition coaching.

If you aren't sure where to start, connect with our intake coordinator who will provide guidance, clarification, and a conversation about what might work best for you. You can contact our coordinator by phone at **(250) 978-0789** or email [mentalhealth@talltreehealth.ca](mailto:mentalhealth@talltreehealth.ca).