

## **Overcoming Negative Thoughts From Eating Disorders**

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Eating disorder treatment and recovery requires a paradigm shift in thinking. If one chooses recovery, then one must begin to examine their internal dialogue and irrational conclusions about themselves and life, in general. Anorexia, bulimia, binge eating disorder and compulsive overeating are often signs of a troubled internal relationship with oneself. Understanding the importance of the messages we give ourselves leads many to desire a more positive internal dialogue.

Resolution of uncomfortable feelings and regrettable behaviors directly improves the quality of your life. The theory of cognitive behavior therapy empowers you to use your God given logical thinking capacity to improve your life.

Using cognitive behavior therapy can inspire hope, self-esteem and empowerment within you. Here are the common thinking errors identified by this theory, developed by Dr. Aaron Beck (he earned his Ph.D. in psychiatry from Yale University in 1946):

### **Arbitrary Inference**

This means to jump to conclusions without a factual basis for your determination. It means to expect the worst, when that is generally not the way things turn out. Actually, things more often than not turn out somewhere in the middle of our highest and lowest expectations.

### **Selective Abstraction**

Only focusing on one piece of information and not taking the whole story into account. This means to select only parts of the whole picture to focus on. When we actually process things more logically, it makes sense to take in the whole picture and not just an isolated incident.

### **Overgeneralization**

To apply a negative paradigm about ourselves or our lives to every aspect of our lives. For example, to say “I always lose” is an overgeneralization. No one always loses. Heck, out of millions of little sperm competing for an egg, you are the one that made it! So, this is one success that already contradicts the “I always lose” theory. I bet you can come up with more winning scenarios in your life that refute irrational generalizations like this.

### **Magnification and Minimization**

To view a situation as all good or all bad. Rather than appreciating that both good and bad exist in most human experiences. For example, I may focus on the poor economy and feel depressed and anxious about finances. But, if I do not solely focus on the economy, but also appreciate my stable employment, savings account and retirement plans, then I may find I feel more peaceful and less panicked.

### **Labeling and Mislabeled**

“I am a fat pig”. Ouch! Name calling is never okay and least of all toward oneself in our internal dialogue. No human being is a pig, and this is ridiculous label to call oneself when it is exposed to rational thinking. Another indication of this thinking error is when one allows past experiences to determine our self esteem today. People change, evolve and grow. A failure in one’s past does not mean that you cannot be successful now. It just means that you’re human, like the rest of us.

### **Personalization**

This means to take things personally. Someone else in a bad mood does not mean it is your fault! Someone else letting you down does not mean you are bad. We must remain clear on what is about us and what is not. Quite often, others behaviors and attitudes is about them, and doesn’t even involve us.

### **Polarized Thinking**

Seeing life and ourselves in black and white is a common thinking error. Not much is that simple! Try to recognize it when you are viewing a situation in extremes and choose to moderate your view. For example, not getting an A on a term paper is disappointing when you have worked hard and done your best. However, one grade and even one class does not determine your academic success overall.

### **Conclusions**

The wonderful thing about recognizing and correcting these irrational thinking errors is that it empowers the individual struggling with an eating disorder to begin taking care of themselves emotionally. They learn self soothing skills through thinking things through in a more balanced way, thus lessening their need to practice disordered eating to cope. Eating disorder self-help skills should be practiced in conjunction with licensed treatment from an eating disorders center.