

## Problematic thinking styles

Once you are able to capture and dissect any irrational thoughts, you will begin to reduce and take away their power and influence. Below are some of the main problematic thinking styles and at the bottom of the next page are just some simple questions, helping you to develop healthier thinking styles.

Problematic thought styles include:

**All or nothing thinking:** Do you remember the marmite advert? “*you either love it or hate it*” Well this sums up the style of all or nothing thinking. Experiences may be deemed good or bad, success or failure? Here your views are split into extremes and there is no flexibility in seeing and experiencing the many other alternatives available. Language attributed to this style of thinking are the words ‘Never, should, must, have to, always and every’. These words create rigid rules about how to behave leading to feelings of frustration, resentment, guilt, shame and anger. My experience informs me that clients with anxiety and panic disorders are often susceptible to this type of thinking.

**Minimization:** Minimisation is another side of catastrophising, here you minimize your own good qualities and can also be used to avoid negative emotions, where you are reluctant to acknowledge them.

**Catastrophising:** Remember the saying ‘Making mountains out of mole hills’? Sometimes the internal thought is saying ‘What if this happens, what if that happens, what if so and so... it will be a catastrophe’. Again with this particular style of thinking greater focus is given to the worst possible outcome. You may have noticed already that the styles of thinking have similarities to each other, again this type of thinking can lead to signs of withdrawal, panic and anxiety, low mood and depression.

**Grandiosity:** Having an exaggerated sense of self-importance or ability.

**Personalisation:** This has a similarity to that of grandiosity, that presumes you are the centre of the universe, Personalisation occurs when you hold yourself personally responsible for an event that isn't entirely under your control. Blaming or scape-goating is the opposite, here you blame other people or circumstances for your problems but overlook the part you might be playing in it.

**Mind reading:** I like to call this crystal ball thinking or fortune telling. Now... human nature likes to have control and a degree of certainty about the future, I agree with this. Now what happens in mind reading is again when thoughts become stuck and rigid, where there are negative and unrealistic predictions of future events – resulting in feelings of doom and hopelessness. *I am thinking it so it must be true and therefore the thought is taken as fact.* Do you ever recall experiencing something and then after thinking it wasn't as bad as what you first thought? It is interesting to look at the initial thoughts.

**Emotional reasoning:** This style of thinking occurs when you believe what you are feeling must be true. There becomes rigidity in the thinking style and belief. E.G I feel stupid so it means I am stupid, therefore others will think I am stupid. What happens here is that these thoughts then begin to generate the behaviours and you look for the evidence to prove it, which becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

**Paranoia:** 'The postman is reading my mail. One of my letters last week was not stuck down. He knows all my secrets'. Paranoia is being suspicious without the evidence or reasons, with the belief that people are out to persecute you.

All of these particular thought styles limit the behaviours that are available to become more resourceful and successful in life. They have limiting functions and can be intensely uncomfortable to the person who is experiencing them.

#### **Thought starters to challenge unhelpful compelling thoughts**

- How do you react when you believe that thought?
- How do you know that thought is absolute truth?
- Who would you be without that thought?
- Can you imagine what you want to think and feel?
- How would you behave without that thought?
- What could you become without that thought?
- What outcomes will result?

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