Some Common Thinking Errors
(Cognitive Distortions)

1. **Black and White Thinking (All or Nothing Thinking)**

   In black and white thinking we tend to see things, ourselves and other people as being all wrong or all right, all good or all bad. We are a total success or we are a total failure. We are either completely 100% right or we are 100% wrong. The reality is <u>we all</u> make mistakes. Life is a learning process and nobody is perfect. For example, if we make one mistake we see ourselves as having failed.

2. **Overgeneralization**

   In overgeneralization when we experience a single, negative event such as not getting a job that we applied for, we tend to think we will never get a job ever again. We make a mistake and we think we can never do things right. We make conclusions based on single events. For example "Everything I do turns out wrong."

3. **Catastrophising**

   When we catastrophise we automatically think the worst is going to happen, it will be awful and we will not be able to cope. For example, "My relationship broke up, so nobody will want a relationship with me again in the future."

4. **Mental Filter**

   In mental filter we see all the negatives and seldom see the positives. We filter out all the good things that life has and overly focus on negative parts of life. We pick on a single negative detail and dwell on it. We overly dwell on the negative and totally ignore the positives. We make predictions about what will happen to us in the future based on little information. For example, someone says we have done well, but we discount this because we say it was only said to be nice, it wasn't really meant; or 100 good reviews and one bad review and we focus on the single bad review.

5. **Magnifying or Minimising (Binocular Vision)**

   In magnifying/minimising we blow things out of proportion. We make mountains out of molehills. We tend to minimise the strengths and qualities of ourselves and others and magnify and exaggerate the supposed weaknesses, mistakes and errors.

6. **Personalisation and Blame**

   In personalisation and blame if something bad happens we assume it is our fault. We tend to blame ourselves solely for situations and events that we were not entirely responsible for. The opposite example is we take no personal responsibility; we blame other people and situations. Example "My relationship broke up so it must be all my fault", or "My relationship broke up so it must be all his/her fault."

7. **Labelling and Mislabelling**

   In labelling/mislabelling we call ourselves and other people by negative names for our/their supposed shortcomings. These are not based on the facts, but on only one or two negative incidents. Example "I'm an idiot", "She's a moron", "I'm stupid".

8. **Jumping to Conclusions**

   In jumping to conclusions we tend to make a negative interpretation even though we don't have all the facts to support our view.

   a. **Mind Reading** We think we know what other people are thinking about us, for example, that they think we are stupid, incompetent, and may disapprove of us; we do not bother to check this out. For example, if a friend walks by on the other side of the street we mind read and think I've offended her, so she is ignoring me.

   b. **Fortune Telling** We think that events will turn out bad without having any evidence to support this view. For example, I'll fail my exams, or I won't go for the job I want because I know I won't get it.

9. **Emotional Reasoning**

   In emotional reasoning we let our feelings guide our interpretation of reality. We think that what we are feeling must be accurate, so if we feel we are a failure then we must be; if we feel we are ugly then we must be. We do not look for facts to support what we feel; we have a feeling and just accept it. If we feel we are weak, useless, stupid we just accept it. We may be so stressed that we have difficulty with our emotions and therefore conclude that our marriage is not working, when in fact it is our blunted emotions that are causing the problem. We reason from how we feel, I feel an idiot, so I must really be one.

10. **Discounting the Positive**

    In discounting the positive we trivialise the positive things about ourselves and others saying that these positives do not count for much. For example your partner says you are good at something, but you say they are only saying it because they are your partner.

11. **11. Hindsight Thinking**

    In hindsight thinking we look back at decisions we made in the past and make judgements about the decision we made. We often think we should have handled things better, but hindsight thinking is always 20/20. Looking back with the benefit of hindsight we may now make a different decision with our current knowledge; however, we made the decision at that time with the evidence, knowledge and experience we had at that time. For example, "When I left University I should have gone for a different type of job, all the work problems I've got now I wouldn't have if I had taken that job."

12. **Fairness Error**

    In fairness error we tend to judge peoples actions by what we think is fair or not fair. We feel resentful when someone does not act towards us in a way that we think is fair. Their version of what is fair is probably different from our version of what is fair. For example, "If my

husband really cared about how I felt, he would take on more responsibility for the house and the children."

13. **Unrealistic Comparisons**

In unfair comparisons we compare ourselves to other people, work colleagues etc, and view them as being more successful, better at coping than we are, are happier than we are, and better at handling life than we are.

Many common stress-induced beliefs include the words *ought*, *should* or *must*, for example:

I *ought* to have done better

Life *should* be fair

I *must* get all this done today

Some common 'shouldisms' are:

I *should* drive an expensive care

He *should* be more polite

I *should* be a better tennis player

She *should* look where she is going when she drives

I *should* always look perfect when I go out

He *should* never interrupt

I *should* have done better

I *should* be living in a better house by now

I *should* be earning more money