

Working with negative scripts



We tend to trust what goes on in our brains. After all, if you can't trust your own brain, what can you trust? However, there are some occasions when your brain isn't quite as reliable as we would like. It's not that your brain is purposely lying to you, it's just that it may have developed some faulty or non-helpful connections over time, known as "cognitive distortions" or "negative scripts".

Cognitive distortions are biased perspectives we take on about ourselves and the world around us. They are irrational thoughts and beliefs that we unknowingly reinforce and strengthen over time. These thought systems are often subtle and can be difficult to recognise but are particularly effective at triggering or exacerbating symptoms of depression. That is why they can be so damaging and it's hard to change something you don't recognise is happening but needs to change!

So, what do you do? Here are 10 helpful steps in recognising and challenging when these scripts are running in your head:

1) The first step in changing these cognitive distortions or negative scripts is recognising them. Below are the 10 most common cognitive distortions – do you recognise any of them?

<p style="text-align: center;">All-or-Nothing Thinking</p> <p>You see things as black or white, never grey. In other words, you see things in extremes. E.g., you are either perfect or a total failure.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Overgeneralisation</p> <p>You see a single negative event as a never-ending pattern, E.g. "I messed up", "I never get anything right". This can lead to negative thoughts about yourself and your environment based on only one or two experiences.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Mental Filter</p> <p>You pick out a single negative detail and dwell on it exclusively so that your view of reality becomes darkened, like a drop of ink that discolours an entire glass of water.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Disqualifying the Positive</p> <p>You reject positive experiences by insisting they "don't count" for some reason or other. E.g., you get a positive review at work but disqualify it saying "he was just being nice"</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Jumping to Conclusions</p> <p>Mind reading – the belief that you know what someone is thinking. E.g., you see someone frown and assume they don't like you.</p> <p>Fortune Telling – the tendency to make predictions based on little/no evidence. E.g., assuming you will never find love and be happy because you are currently not in a relationship</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Magnification (Catastrophising) or Minimisation</p> <p>You exaggerate the importance of things (such as your error or someone else's success), or you incorrectly shrink things until they appear tiny (your own desirable qualities or the other person's imperfections).</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Emotional Reasoning</p> <p>You believe that your negative emotions reflect the way that things really are: "I feel it, therefore it must be true".</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">"Should" (Must, Ought To) Statements</p> <p>You tell yourself you 'should', 'ought' or 'must' do things in a certain way which creates impossible to achieve expectations and a sense of guilt and failure when we don't meet them</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Labelling and Mislabelling</p> <p>This is an extreme form of overgeneralization. Instead of describing your error, you attach a negative label to yourself: "I'm a loser" instead of "I didn't do that well". Mislabelling is describing an event with harsh, emotional or judging statements</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Personalisation</p> <p>You blame yourself for being the cause of some negative event for which you were not responsible. So, for example, if something goes wrong and affects others negatively, you take on the blame for it and feel bad.</p>

Cognitive distortions come in many forms, but they all have some things in common. All cognitive distortions are:

- Tendencies or patterns of thinking or believing.
- That are false or inaccurate.
- And have the potential to cause psychological damage.

- 2) Be open to the possibility that what your brain is saying isn't true and then work to discredit the script, to prove what it's saying to be fake news** - What evidence is there that proves it wrong e.g., examples when what the script said wasn't/didn't happen, when it said you can't do something and you did – find all the evidence against the script
- 3) Remember that you are not the script.** - Think of the script as a physical book. It has many chapters documenting every mistake we've ever made, all the bad things that could or have happened, detailing how we 'should' behave, think, and feel about every possible situation. The script also has an audio version, which is what we can hear in our heads each day. *But it is not us.* It is just the script being read to us. If the script says you are useless, this is not true, nor relevant. It is just the script's opinion. Mentally put down the script and accept that, although we can't change what's in it or get rid of it, we don't need to read it all day long, and we certainly don't need to act upon what it says.
- 4) Choose! Don't let the script sit in the driver's seat** - The script lives in our reptilian brain and is much faster at responding than our conscious brain. If we don't consciously choose thoughts, feelings, and actions, the script will jump in and choose for us. Start with small things: What would I choose to eat? What activities do I love? Be mindful of what you say. Cut off the script and choose to think of something else. Get out of bed at the time you planned to. Choose not to engage in arguments. Choose to take a bath or read a book. Every small choice moves us away from the script and strengthens our choosing muscles.



- 5) **Laugh or smile** - Your body and mind don't understand the difference between forced laughter and natural laughter. When you smile or make a laughter sound it sends a message to your brain that all is ok, and you are happy. It strengthens your relationship with your true self and draws you away from the script. So, as well as remembering to smile and laugh for no reason, building opportunities to laugh into your life can also be a real help.
- 6) **Focus on what the script doesn't see** - When you're walking down the street, the script is on high alert for potential threats. It's trained to look out for all the negatives and potential problems. If you (your higher self) are not alert, you will listen to all the bad things the script has spotted, not just in the street but in your job, your relationship, the activity you're doing, your children's behaviour, your body... and on and on. One way to practice disconnecting from the script and tuning into the real you is to focus in on all the good stuff the script filters out. These don't have to be anything huge. It could be a text from a friend, a hug for your child, a chance to grab a cup of tea in silence, or a warm bed at the end of a long day. You could write down affirmations of the positive things about you or think of all the things you are grateful for – it is impossible to feel grateful and negative at the same time! See the affirmation statement card at the bottom of the page which you could cut out and keep in your purse/wallet to look at when you notice the negative script playing.
- 7) **Be mindful of your language** - The more we look for something, the more it will show up in our life. This is true not just in terms of what we see in the world but also the stories we tell ourselves. The reptilian brain (where the script lives) doesn't take time to fact-check what it tells us, yet because it's coming from inside our own head, we tend to believe it. It's like taking in a headline but not reading or researching the article, then accepting that headline as fact and maybe even repeating it to others. So, if someone asks you how you are and you immediately jump in with "tired" or "stressed," this is what you will believe and therefore how you will feel. If you moan about your partner or say critical things to them, you are repeatedly telling yourself that your partner isn't good enough. How do you think this affects how you feel and act toward them? And the response you get in return?
- 8) **Try Movement and Meditation** – I know it may be boring to hear but exercise and movement really does help! Exercising for twenty minutes a day is as effective in boosting your mood as some antidepressants. So, whether you're depressed or not, that has got to be good for you! It gets you out of your head, where the script is, and into your body. By getting into your body, you can tune into your conscious mind, and you'll likely find that ideas, inspiration, and solutions to your problems present themselves. Alternatively, get out of your head and get into your body with a few minutes of deliberate breath work, meditation or body movement (like a yoga class) to disrupt those thinking patterns.
- 9) **Write Instead of Think** – get a pen and paper and write down the negative thought and why the negative thought is present. Writing versus thinking helps purge the thought out, and when you can see the words on paper it is easier to make sense of it and move forward. Physically writing is better at engaging different parts of your brain to consider the thought, choose the words and physically shape the letters on the page – the more of your frontal cortex which is engaged the more logical reasoning you can put into discrediting the negative thought!
- 10) **Stop Watching the Morning News** - Research has shown just three minutes of negative news in the morning will significantly increase your chances of a negative experience over the course of the day. Research has also shown that positive mindset increases productivity and satisfaction while reducing errors rates. Mindset is a choice, but not always an easy one. Look to eliminate negative influences such as stop watching morning news, and replace with listening to music you find uplifting, saying affirmations to yourself or looking at pictures which remind you of being happy.

Affirmation
statement card

