unhelpful thinking styles

When a person experiences an unhelpful emotion (eg, depression or anxiety), it is usually preceded by a number of unhelpful self-statements and thoughts. Often there is a pattern to such thoughts and we call these, "unhelpful thinking styles". One of the things we have noticed is that people use unhelpful thinking styles as an automatic habit. It is something that happens out of our awareness. However, when a person consistently and constantly uses some of these styles of thinking, they can often cause themselves a great deal of emotional distress. This information sheet describes a number of "unhelpful thinking styles". As you read through them, you might notice some thinking patterns and styles that you use consistently. Some of these styles might sound similar to one another. They are not meant to be distinct categories but to help you see if there is a kind of pattern to your thoughts.

Mental Filter:
This thinking styles involves a "filtering in" and "filtering out" process – a sort of "tunnel vision," focusing on only one part of a situation and ignoring the rest. Usually this means looking at the negative parts of a situation and forgetting the positive parts, and the whole picture is coloured by what may be a single negative detail.

e.g., Lisa has gained 2kgs. She is sure that everyone finds her unattractive now, despite the fact that she was asked out on a date last week and her friends told her they like a recent photo of her

Jumping to Conclusions:
We jump to conclusions when we assume that we know what someone else is thinking (mind reading) and when we make predictions about what is going to happen in the future (predictive thinking).

e.g., She probably thinks I am fat and lazy OR if I eat more than 1000 calories a day my weight will keep going up and it won't stop

Personalisation:
This involves blaming yourself for everything that goes wrong or could go wrong, even when you may only be partly responsible or not responsible at all. You might be taking 100% responsibility for the occurrence of external events.

e.g., It is all my fault that my parents fight

Catastrophising:
Catastrophising occurs when we "blow things out of proportion"., and we view the situation as terrible, awful, dreadful, and horrible, even though the reality is that the problem itself is quite small.

e.g., If I do not stay this thin it would be awful because nobody will ever be attracted to me ever again

Black & White Thinking:
This thinking style involves seeing only one extreme or the other. You are either wrong or right, good or bad and so on. There are no in-betweens or shades of gray

e.g., if I don't stick to my diet perfectly then I have failed. If I eat one biscuit I may as well have eaten 10

Shoulding and Musting:
Sometimes by saying "I should…" or "I must…" you can put unreasonable demands or pressure on yourself and others. Although these statements are not always unhelpful (eg "I should not get drunk and drive home"), they can sometimes create unrealistic expectations.

e.g., I should never eat carbohydrates

Overgeneralisation:
When we overgeneralise, we take one instance in the past or present, and impose it on all current or future situations. If we say "You always…" or "Everyone…", or "I never…" then we are probably overgeneralising.

e.g., last time I regained weight my boyfriend and I broke up, so I'm never going to put on weight again

Labelling:
We label ourselves and others when we make global statements based on behaviour in specific situations. We might use this label even though there are many more examples that aren't consistent with that label.

e.g., I am weak because I binge eat

Emotional Reasoning:
This thinking style involves basing your view of situations or yourself on the way you are feeling. For example, the only evidence that something bad is going to happen is that you feel like something bad is going to happen.

e.g., I feel fat so I must have gained weight

Magnification and Minimisation:
In this thinking style, you magnify the positive attributes of other people and minimise your own positive attributes. It's as though you're explaining away your own positive characteristics or achievements as though they're not important.

e.g., She said I looked pretty but that doesn't count because she is always polite

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