

Using Mindfulness to Identify and Transform Thinking Patterns: De-catastrophizing



Mindfulness practices strive to bring our full attention to our body and mind in the present moment without trying to change our thoughts or experiences. We simply observe whatever is occurring in the body or mind (sensations, thoughts, and feelings). By regularly engaging in mindful practices, we can begin to see the ever-changing nature of our bodies and minds, as well as the patterns of thinking that often lead to stress and suffering. This awareness in turn provides the opportunity to shift those patterns and achieve greater balance and peace in our lives.

Cognitive distortions are irrational thoughts that have the power to influence how you feel. Examples include overgeneralization, polarized thinking, fallacies of control or fairness, tyranny of “shoulds,” and global labeling. Everyone has *some* cognitive distortions—they’re a normal part of being a human. However, when cognitive distortions are too plentiful or extreme, they can be harmful. By learning to recognize and question our thinking patterns, we can correct many of these cognitive distortions.

Catastrophizing is a cognitive distortion that describes when we exaggerate the importance of a problem, or assume the worst possible outcome to be true.

The following questions can help identify and challenge thinking patterns.

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| What is the situation? What are you thinking that’s causing worry? |
| How much do I believe this? (rate on a scale of 1-100%) |
| This thought makes me feel: |
| What evidence makes this thought seem true? |
| What evidence makes this thought seem false? |
| How likely is this thought to come true? |

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If this does come true, what is the worst thing that could happen?

If this does come true, what is *most likely* to happen?

If your worry does come true, what is the likelihood that you will be ok in one week? In one month? In one year?

How much do I believe this thought now? (rate on a scale of 1-100%)

How do I feel now?