

Thinking Traps



Certain types or patterns of thoughts tend to trap us in anxiety. These are called Thinking Traps. Some teens have lots of anxious thoughts about the future. Some focus more on what other people are thinking. Some think about wanting to stay safe and see danger lurking around every corner. Others seem to always imagine the worst possible scenario!

Whatever thinking traps you tend to fall into, the first important step is to **recognize your personal traps**.

Below is a list of common thinking traps.

Thinking Trap	What's Going On	Examples
All or Nothing Thinking (or Black and White Thinking)	Thinking only of possible outcomes at either extreme (really good or really bad) and not seeing all the possible outcomes in-between (or the "grey"). Most of life is somewhere in the middle.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One friend gets angry at you » "Nobody likes me, I'm totally unlovable and selfish."• Failing one test » "I'm obviously a stupid loser."• Presentation at school » "I'm going to either ace the performance or totally flop."
Catastrophizing	Imagining the worst-case scenario, no matter how unlikely in reality.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Getting one bad grade » "I won't get into university and I'll end up homeless."• Mom and Dad have a fight » "They are obviously going to get a divorce."

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Overestimating	Exaggerating the likelihood that something bad will happen.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "If I have another panic attack I'm going to have a heart attack and die!"
Fortune Telling	Believing you can predict the future. But you can't because you don't have a crystal ball.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "I couldn't find a job last summer so I won't be able to get one this summer."• "No one is going to talk to me at the party."
Overgeneralizing	Making sweeping judgments about ourselves (or others) based on only one or two experiences. These thoughts typically contain the words "always" and "never." The problem: you can never be summed up in one word or base your value as a person on only one single experience!	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One friend gets upset at you » "I always screw up friendships. I have no real friends."• Missing one soccer goal » "I never get things right."
Mind Reading	Believing you know what others are thinking (and assuming it's negative), without any real evidence. The problem: you can't read minds, so stop trying.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "I know they are talking about me right now. They are thinking about how weird I look."• "Everyone is wondering what I'm doing at this party."• "I know she thinks my gift is lame."

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Negative Brain Filter	Focusing only on the negative without seeing any of the positive or what is going well.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thinking about the one person you didn't have a smooth conversation with at the party, rather than the three people with whom you had great conversations.• Thinking about the question you couldn't answer on the test, rather on the ones you could.