Cognitive Barriers

All-or-nothing Thinking

This thinking style is present when a person sees things as either “black or white” or that something can only be “this way” or “that way.” This style of thinking does not allow for any other options or possibilities. With this thinking style, a person is either a “total success” at something or a “complete failure.” For example, if your goal was to earn one million dollars, a person with all-or-nothing thinking would see himself as a complete failure if he “only” earned $999,000. This style of thinking traps a person into believing that they have to be perfect, 100% of the time, and that anything less than that constitutes failure. The result is often constant stress or pressure to be perfect and it often crushes or prevents happiness and a sense of achievement.

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1. Use the ALC Journal to write down the event or situation with which you’re having a problem.
2. Challenge the reality of the situation:
   * Will you really, truly be a total failure if this situation is not resolved completely?
   * Do you really have to get EVERYTHING you want out of this situation in order for you to feel satisfied?
   * Write down what parts of the situation would make you feel some sense of accomplishment or contentment.
3. See things as a process: “I can get some of what I want now and get some other things later.”
4. Journal this experience. Write down the situation and your initial reaction to it and then write down your more rational approach to the situation. Save this journal entry in case you need a reminder of how to deal with similar situations.

Overgeneralization

This style of thinking is present when a person takes one event and then believes that the impact of that event will just keep happening. This cognitive style is often focused on negative events. For example, if a person gets a speeding ticket on the way to work one morning, she thinks, “This day will only get worse from here.”

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1. Use the ALC Journal to write down the event or situation with which you’re having a problem.
2. Challenge the reality of the situation:
   * Will one negative event really guarantee that more negative events will follow?
   * Will one or two negative events really prevent anything positive or pleasant from happening?
   * Will a couple of negative events really “curse” you from now on?
   * Write down any negative thoughts you have when you encounter a negative situation (e.g., “It’s all downhill from here!”), and next to those thoughts write, in all caps, “THIS IS NOT TRUE!”
3. See things as a process: This event is just “one of those things” and that’s all it is.
4. Journal this experience. Write down the situation and your initial reaction to it and then write down your more rational approach to the situation. Save this journal entry in case you need a reminder of how to deal with similar situations.

Using the Deficit Model

This cognitive style occurs when a person tends to dwell on negative features while ignoring positive features. This style can be seen in the example of a person who strives to earn $10,000 dollars, but who earns $9,950 instead, and who then berates himself for the $50 that he didn’t earn instead of celebrating the $9,950 he did earn. This cognitive style can keep a person in a constant state of “chasing success” and not enjoying the achievements and accomplishments that he has attained.

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1. Use the ALC Journal to write down the event or situation with which you’re having a problem.
2. Challenge the reality of the situation:
   * Are there really ONLY negative features present in this situation?
   * Are there really NO positive features whatsoever?
   * Has every single moment of the situation literally been one failure or setback after another or have there been at least some minor victories or progress?
3. See things as a process: There will be positives among even a series of negatives, as there will be some negatives among even a series of positives. That’s just how life goes. When there are many negatives and a few positives, journal about the positives. If there are many positives and only a few negatives, journal about the positives.
4. Journal this experience. Write down the situation and your initial reaction to it and then write down your more rational approach to the situation. Save this journal entry in case you need a reminder of how to deal with similar situations.

Jumping to Conclusions

This cognitive style is present when a person makes assumptions about a person or events when there is no evidence to support the assumptions (e.g., “I know those people don’t like me,” when talking about people you don’t know) or when a person makes predictions about events turning out negatively (e.g., “I know that I’m never going to fit in with that group,” when talking about people you don’t know well).

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1. Use the ALC Journal to write down the event or situation with which you’re having a problem.
2. Challenge the reality of the situation:
   * Do you have any actual evidence that the assumption you’re making is accurate?
   * If you have one or two instances of such evidence, does that really mean that every time the event or situation comes up, your assumption will be true every time?
   * Is there room in your assumption for things NOT to turn out the way you think they will?
   * Could you possibly be wrong about your assumptions?
   * Could the event or situation ever be different from what you assume it will be?
3. See things as a process: Making assumptions based on little or no information or evidence is foolish and can prevent you from seeing positive outcomes because you’re expecting negative ones.
4. Journal this experience. Write down the situation and your initial reaction to it and then write down your more rational approach to the situation. Save this journal entry in case you need a reminder of how to deal with similar situations.

Magnification

This cognitive style is present when a person blows things out of proportion and assigns much more importance or significance to a person, event or situation than is actually warranted. For example, a person takes a comment or criticism that someone has made about him (“I think you can improve your sales”) and turns it into “That person hates me!” This style of perception keeps a lot of drama and stress in a person’s life and may make it difficult for others to be around him because he always has some kind of struggle going on.

[“Destroy the Barrier” button goes here]

1. Use the ALC Journal to write down the event or situation with which you’re having a problem.
2. Challenge the reality of the situation:
   * Is it possible that you’re making more out of the situation than is actually there?
   * Is it possible that a person’s comments might not mean what you think they mean?
   * Is it possible that the situation is not as bad or as dire as you think it is?
   * Will it really mean the end of the world if a situation really is as bad as you think it is?
   * Will life actually go on even if the situation is as bad as you think it is?
3. See things as a process: Not everything will be as bad as you think it is and not everything is as important or as dire as you believe it to be.
4. Journal this experience. Write down the situation and your initial reaction to it and then write down your more rational approach to the situation. Save this journal entry in case you need a reminder of how to deal with similar situations.

Minimization

This cognitive style is present when a person tends to inappropriately reduce the importance or significance of a person, event or situation. In this style, a person can perceive an actually important event as meaningless or unimportant. This cognitive style can damage relationships, friendships or business dealings if a person disregards or “blows off” another’s feelings, issues or priorities.

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1. Use the ALC Journal to write down the event or situation with which you’re having a problem.
2. Challenge the reality of the situation:
   * Is it possible that you’re not taking the situation or another’s thoughts, feelings or position as seriously as you should?
   * Is it possible that you’re ignoring or seeing as unimportant things that are actually significant?
3. See things as a process: Although you might see yourself as “laid back,” other people, events or situations might actually deserve more attention, concern and action from you.
4. Journal this experience. Write down the situation and your initial reaction to it and then write down your more rational approach to the situation. Save this journal entry in case you need a reminder of how to deal with similar situations.

“Shoulds”

This cognitive style is present when you criticize yourself or others over things that “should” happen when they have not occurred or not occurred in some preferred way. Ex: “He should spend more time with me than he does.” This style of thinking often flies in the face of reality because, regardless of whether you think something “should” or “shouldn’t” happen, the reality of it is that those things are or are not actually happening. This cognitive style often produces guilt, resentment or judgment of others.

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1. Use the ALC Journal to write down the event or situation with which you’re having a problem.
2. Challenge the reality of the situation:
   * Is there a law that says that you or someone else is obligated to do or not do a particular thing?
   * Is it possible that you’re being critical or judgmental of another person because they are behaving or not behaving in a way that bothers you?
   * Does it really change the person or the situation when you perceive that something should or shouldn’t be done?
3. See things as a process: Perceiving that something should or shouldn’t be done ignores the reality of what is actually happening with a person or situation. Your “should” or “shouldn’t” is really just your preference as to what you would like to have happen.
4. Journal this experience. Write down the situation and your initial reaction to it and then write down your more rational approach to the situation. Save this journal entry in case you need a reminder of how to deal with similar situations.

Labeling

This cognitive style is present when a person perceives that they “are” what they “do.” An example would be a person who failed to achieve a particular goal seeing himself as a “failure” rather than as simply a person who failed to achieve a goal. This cognitive style contributes a great deal to a person developing low self-esteem and a lack of self-confidence if it is used often.

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1. Use the ALC Journal to write down the event or situation with which you’re having a problem.
2. Challenge the reality of the situation:
   * Does losing at a game really make you a “loser” as a human being?
   * Does the performance of a single behavior sum up every single thing about you as a person?
   * Is it possible that you can still be a good person even if you did a negative thing?
3. See things as a process: We are people who do things, but we do not necessarily become the things that we do. Making a mistake doesn’t make you a broken or a bad person. A behavior is what we DO, not who we ARE.
4. Journal this experience. Write down the situation and your initial reaction to it and then write down your more rational approach to the situation. Save this journal entry in case you need a reminder of how to deal with similar situations.

Personalization

This cognitive style is present when a person blames himself for things for which he wasn’t fully responsible. For example, when a child gets in trouble at school and his father believes that, if he were a better parent, his son wouldn’t have gotten into trouble at school. The danger in this style of thinking is that it has a person assuming way too much responsibility for something that was not fully under his control. This is an unrealistic way of looking at things, even when a person takes way too much credit and responsibility for someone else’s success: “My daughter won a scholarship for music, so I know I’m a good mother.” This thought process glorifies the mother while ignoring the reality that her daughter practiced her music diligently and that it was because of extraordinary effort that she won the scholarship.

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1. Use the ALC Journal to write down the event or situation with which you’re having a problem.
2. Challenge the reality of the situation:
   * Could the outcome of the event or situation really have been solely due to you or could there have been other factors at play?
   * Do you truly have some ultimate power that means you can exert such complete influence on the outcome of an event or over another person’s behavior?
   * Does every result of every event really have something to do with you?
3. See things as a process: Some people seem intent on taking credit or blame for things that have little or nothing to do with them. “Life” and other people’s behavior tend to happen on their own terms, and while you might have had some input or influence in a given situation, it is unlikely that the outcome is solely due to you.
4. Journal this experience. Write down the situation and your initial reaction to it and then write down your more rational approach to the situation. Save this journal entry in case you need a reminder of how to deal with similar situations.

Blaming

This cognitive style is present when a person blames other people or disregards ways in which their own behavior and attitudes played a role in the problems that occur. Whereas “Personalization” involves an individual taking on too much responsibility for a situation, “Blaming” involves a person assuming too little personal responsibility for a situation. For example, a man says that his marriage didn’t work out because his ex-wife was selfish and distant, but he ignores all of the problems and pettiness that he brought to the marriage. One of the problems with this way of perceiving things is that it interferes with personal growth and maturity. If you always perceive that a problem is someone else’s fault and has nothing to do with you, you are unlikely to see a need to change your behavior or attitudes.

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1. Use the ALC Journal to write down the event or situation with which you’re having a problem.
2. Challenge the reality of the situation:
   * How often is it that the cause of a problem or difficult situation is always someone else’s fault?
   * What did your behavior or attitude contribute to the problem?
   * Is everyone else always so utterly powerful that they have absolute responsibility for everything that happens or could you have somehow contributed in some way to the problem?
3. See things as a process: If someone else is always to blame for what happens in your life, you are constantly wanting and waiting for them to change and you are unlikely to see a need to effect changes in your own behavior because you don’t ever see yourself as being wrong. There are rarely situations in life in which one person is always right and the other person is always wrong.
4. Journal this experience. Write down the situation and your initial reaction to it and then write down your more rational approach to the situation. Save this journal entry in case you need a reminder of how to deal with similar situations.