



The King's (The Cathedral) School  
Peterborough

# Mindfulness 4: Recognising Cognitive Distortions

**‘(Thinking is) what a great many people think they are doing when they are merely rearranging their prejudices.’**

**William James**





## COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

Negative ways of thinking are often referred to as '**cognitive distortions**'.

Cognitive distortions are powerful because they can easily convince you that your thoughts *are* rational and true. But actually, they give a false or distorted meaning to situations.

They're unhelpful - they can make you feel bad about the world, other people, yourself and your abilities.

Cognitive distortions are also known as '**negative thinking traps**'; and like all traps, they catch you unaware:

you don't even realise you're caught up in thinking this way. Here are some examples ...

**Confirmation Bias.** This involves looking for - or simply going along with - evidence to support and confirm what you've already decided is true, while avoiding or ignoring ideas or information that might explain things differently. So, with negative thinking, you give too much weight to negative aspects of a situation and too little attention to the positive aspects.



**Tunnel thinking.** With tunnel thinking, instead of seeing the whole picture, you focus on the negative aspects only.

**Jumping to a conclusion.** This involves coming to a conclusion - a negative conclusion - about something before you have all the relevant information.



**Polarised thinking.** This is 'all or nothing' thinking. There's no middle ground. Things are either good or bad, right or wrong, a success or a total failure.

**Catastrophising.** When you catastrophise, you think the absolute worst is going to happen in a situation.





**Mind reading.** With mind reading, you believe you know what the other person is thinking and that their thoughts and intentions are negative.

**Blaming.** You place all responsibility for something that's gone wrong on someone or something else. You see yourself as helpless, a victim of other people or external factors. But if you self-blame, you place all responsibility on yourself and see yourself as a victim of your own stupidity or lack of ability.

*'Your perspective on life comes from the cage you were held captive in.'* Shannon L Alder

- **Learn to recognise cognitive distortions and negative thinking traps.**
- **Which of these thoughts do you think might be an example of blaming?**
- Which one is mind reading?
- Which one is catastrophising?
- Which one of these thoughts is an example of polarised thinking?
- Which one is confirmation bias?
- Which one is an example of jumping to a conclusion?

▪ No wonder I've made some mistakes with writing this report. What does my manager expect if she won't give me enough time to complete it properly? **Blaming**

▪ I bet they only asked me to join them because the other person couldn't make it. They obviously didn't want to ask me first. **Mind Reading, Jumping to a Conclusion**

▪ I've never used the tube trains in London before. I'll get confused and stressed. I just know I'll get completely lost. I won't know what to do. **Catastrophising, Polarised Thinking**

▪ The person who interviewed me was very nice but all I can think about was the one question I didn't know how to answer. **Tunnel Thinking**

▪ My manager has changed her mind and doesn't need the report after all. So that's another example of how incompetent she is. **Confirmation Bias**

▪ My friend hasn't replied to my texts. I must have done something to upset him. **Jumping to a Conclusion**

▪ If this isn't perfect it will have been a complete waste of time. **Polarised Thinking**