

The Ten Most Troublesome Misbelief Makers

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1. **Dichotomous Thinking**

Dichotomous thinking fosters the myth of all or none, right or wrong, black or white. Dichotomy comes from two Greek words meaning “cut in two.” Dichotomous thinkers habitually define reality by two extremes, seeing their world as one of polar opposites.

2. **Overgeneralization**

Overgeneralizers are *always* making rules or drawing conclusions and applying them across the board. Many of these rules and assumptions are pessimistic, proving their pessimistic perspective. This particular habit rarely works for the overgeneralizer in the opposite direction – proving from one or two events that all is well, that everything will work out for the best.

Always, never, everybody, nobody, totally, completely, forever, every time – these words popping up in our everyday speech are little yellow flags marked “Warning! Overgeneralizing Misbeliefs Buried Here.”

3. **Ignoring the Positive**

Ignoring what is positive in our lives signals that our perceptions are guided by an unconscious belief that we should pay attention only to problems, shortcomings, or areas needing improvement. Such an outlook robs us of well-deserved joy, satisfaction, and self-esteem. Deftly disregarding the positives in our personalities, skills, relationships, and accomplishments ensures a dreary outlook on all of life.

4. **Arbitrary Inference**

Arbitrary inference is when we unnecessarily predetermine a negative meaning to many events of our day. We let our fears get the best of us by misinterpreting circumstances or people's behavior.

5. **Mind Reading**

Lots of us play the mind reading game, forgetting that the only person who has direct access to a human mind is its owner. Misbeliefs frequently result from *assuming*, usually unfairly, that we know the wishes and thoughts of another person.

6. **Magnification**

Caricatured detectives go through life holding a magnifying glass before their eyes. We act in a similarly ridiculous manner when we make something small into a *big deal*. Magnification, what Albert Ellis labeled “catastrophizing,” is the erroneous habit of convincing ourselves that circumstances we don't like are major disasters.

7. **Minimization**

Often the same twist in logic that leads to magnification of negatives also leads to MINIMIZATION of positives. Good fortune, fine performances, happy times, thoughtful actions by others, etc., fade into insignificance on our mental TV screen when we minimize their value or worth by discounting, explaining, rationalizing, or undermining the positives.

8. **Reification of Feelings**

Convinced that our feelings are the infallible barometer of a given incident or set of circumstances, reification of feelings is the belief that *feelings* represent reality. Many people rely on their feelings as a guide and compass through life. Some of the most difficult of all misbeliefs to find are those in which we reify our feelings because our feelings are so real to us. When we are having a frustrating, down, or difficult day, reification of our feelings can be a self-perpetuating spiral of negative feelings and self-defeating self-talk.

**reify - to convert into or regard as a concrete thing.*

9. **Labeling**

We do this when, instead of objectively describing behavior or actions (our own or someone else's), we attach a derogatory label to the person. Labeling is “name calling,” like what children often do. Unfortunately, as we grow up, too often we fail to outgrow this behavior. We simply expand our vocabulary, becoming more sophisticated in the process. Labeling is an ineffective shortcut for expressing how we are feeling.

10. **Fortune-Telling**

Fortune-telling is when we habitually predict dismal outcomes, expect the worst, and anticipate what might never be. *No one* knows for sure what the outcome of any given situation will be. By telling ourselves we know what the outcome will be, by playing the game of fortune-telling, we, in effect, play it safe, avoid taking risks, and miss opportunities for reconciliation and personal growth.