



Issue 2: May 12, 2020

## OUR MISSION

*Adolescent Counseling Services (ACS) empowers youth in our community to find their way through social-emotional support and by building safe, accepting communities.*

## WHO WE SERVE

*Adolescent Counseling Services (ACS) exists to support the wellbeing of all teens, tweens, and young adults ages 10-25 in Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties.*

## OUR HISTORY

*Founded in 1975, ACS currently implements four core programs in Santa Clara and San Mateo County communities:*

***Adolescent Substance Abuse Treatment***

***Community Counseling***

***On-Campus Counseling***

***Outlet***

## Thinking Errors: Tips for Youth and Parents

During these uncertain times, there has been a wave of self-help advice on how to manage stress and improve mental health. Although this is well meaning, it can leave some feeling overwhelmed and a reminder of all the things we don't have the capacity for. Rather than adding another item on the to-do list, this article will identify thinking errors and tips for mental shifts that can reduce them.

Thinking errors are common thought patterns that can lead to increased stress, anxiety, and an altered perception of reality. Research shows that by challenging these negative thought patterns, we can cope more effectively during stressful times and improve our overall mental well-being.

In this article, we outline common thinking errors of both teens and parents as well as quick tips for reducing them.

## Common Thinking Errors for Youth

- Catastrophizing- Predicting only negative outcomes or worst case scenarios based on limited information.
  - Ex. "If I fail this test I will never get into college or get a job"
- Magnification- Emphasizing the negative of a situation
  - Ex. Looking at all of the terrible things on the news and concluding the world is a bad place.
- Mind Reading- Believing we know what others are thinking.
  - Ex. "I didn't do my homework this week. Everyone must think I am lazy and stupid."
- Personalization- Assigning blame to oneself based on the actions of others or some external circumstance.
  - Ex. "My parents are fighting because of me."
- Emotional reasoning- Making judgements solely based on our emotions, discounting logic or facts.
  - Ex. "I feel jealous so my partner must be cheating on me."
- Control Fallacy- Believing we have no control over our lives.
  - Ex. "I'm stuck at home and feel miserable and bored. There is nothing I can do about it."

## Tips for Reducing Thinking Errors

- Ask yourself, what are some other potential outcomes for this situation?
- Magnification - Challenge your conclusion by thinking of evidence to the contrary.
- Mind Reading - When jumping to conclusions about what others are thinking, challenge yourself by asking what evidence you have to support this claim. What stories are we telling ourselves based on the situation at hand?
- Personalization - Try to mentally list some of the other factors at play that could be causing this situation.
- Emotional Reasoning - Optimal thinking involves a combination of emotion and logic. If you find yourself using emotion alone, a useful exercise is to check the facts that support and/or contradict your conclusion.
- While we may not be able to control everything in our environment, we can empower ourselves to take control over the ways in which we respond.



## Common Thinking Errors for Parents

- Disqualifying the Positive-
  - Ex. "Thinking that you only got to where you are out of luck. You attribute success to luck and failure to personal flaw."
- Fallacy of Change-
  - Ex. Thinking "If only I could get my partner to change this one thing, I would be a happier person and they would be perfect." This way of thinking can lead to the belief that forcing others to change is the only way to get the change we want.
- Mislabeled-
  - Ex. Using one or two instances to judge and label yourself or others. Thinking you are a failure because you are finding it challenging to balance all that is demanded of you.
- Control Fallacies-
  - Ex. 1: Believing that you have no control over your life.
  - Ex. 2: Believing that you have ultimate control over everything in your life.
- Should, Must, or Ought statements-
  - Ex. Telling yourself that you "should" be more productive now that you are at-home more or "must get over things". Too many of these thinking errors can lead to feelings of guilt and shame.

## When you Notice Yourself Making Thinking Errors

- Acknowledge them! Notice what thinking error(s) you are making. You might even consider jotting down the thinking errors to get a better sense of the ones you make more often.
- Try and reframe your thoughts. Ask yourself if your thinking error(s) can be supported by evidence. If possible, challenge your thoughts.
- Most importantly, treat yourself with kindness and compassion! Everyone makes thinking errors, and it's not easy to challenge and change your thinking.



## Student Art Submission

This beautiful art piece was submitted by Naomi Perez. She is an 11th grade student at Woodside High School.



## Resources

- If you and/or your child are wanting more support with thinking errors, below are some resources.
- Consult with a mental health specialist. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) has a focus on combating and working through thinking errors.
- Consider doing research to better understand thinking errors. Below are a couple of reliable websites with great information on thinking errors.

<https://childmind.org/article/how-to-change-negative-thinking-patterns/>

<https://psychcentral.com/lib/15-common-cognitive-distortions/>

- Any other additional questions or concerns, feel free to reachout to Matthew Stull via email to [matthew@acs-teens.org](mailto:matthew@acs-teens.org) or by phone to (650)-434-2443.

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