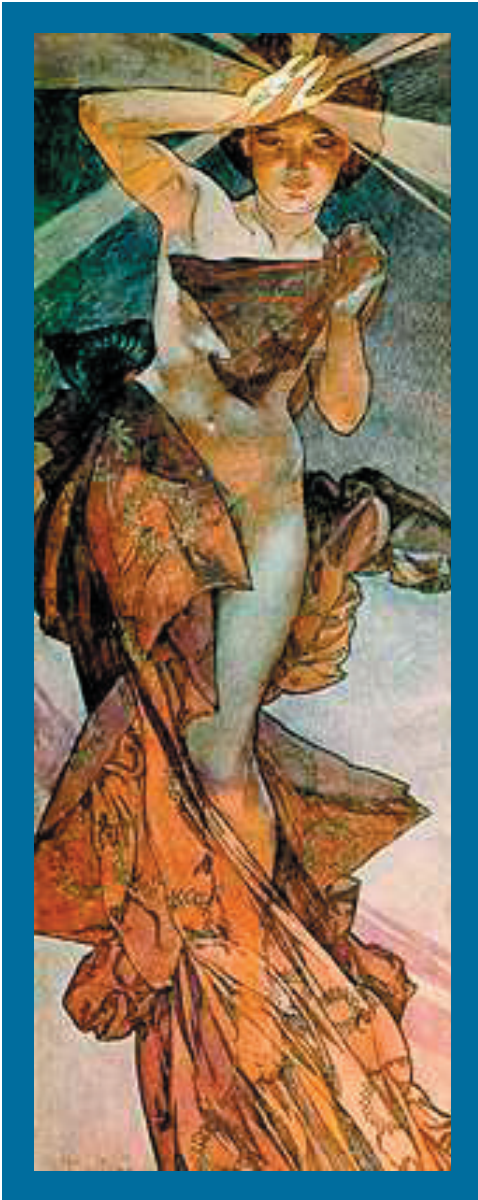


Twelve Cognitive Distortions

from the work of David Burns, MD



We all tend to think in extremes... & when traumatic events take place, we may think that way even more. Here are some common cognitive distortions; take a look & see if any of them might be getting in your way.

All-or-Nothing Thinking.

You see things in black & white categories. If your performance falls at all short of perfect, you see yourself as a total failure.

Over-Generalization.

You see a single negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat.

Mental Filtering.

You pick out a single negative detail & dwell on it exclusively so that your entire vision of reality becomes darkened, like the drop of ink that discolors an entire glass of water.

Disqualifying the Positive.

You reject positive experiences by insisting they don't count. You maintain a negative belief that is actually contradicted by your everyday experiences.

Jumping to Conclusions.

You make a negative interpretation even though there are no definite facts to support your conclusion in a convincing way.

Mind-Reading.

You arbitrarily conclude that someone is reacting negatively to you without choosing to check it out first.

The Fortune-Teller's Error.

You anticipate that things will turn out badly, & feel convinced that your prediction is an already-established fact.

Magnification & Minimization.

You exaggerate the importance of some things (your goof-up or someone else's achievement) or inappropriately shrink other things (your own desirable qualities or the other person's imperfections)—also known as the binocular trick."

Emotional Reasoning.

You assume that your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are: "I feel it, therefore it must be true."

"Should" Statements.

You try to motivate yourself with shoulds & shouldn'ts, musts & oughts, as if you had to be punished before you could be expected to do anything. The emotional consequence is shame & unproductive guilt. When you direct "should" statements toward others, you can expect to feel anger, frustration, & resentment.

Personalization.

You see yourself as the cause of some negative external event, for which, in fact, you were not primarily responsible.

Labeling & Mislabeleding.

Instead of observing & describing your error, you attach an overly generalized negative label to yourself ("I'm a loser"). Or, when someone else's behavior rubs you the wrong way, you attach a negative label to him: "He's an idiot." Mislabeleding involves describing an event with highly colored & emotionally loaded judgmental language.

