

Unhelpful Thinking Styles

Black and White Thinking

When a person experiences an unhelpful emotion (eg, depression or anxiety), it is usually preceded by a number of unhelpful self-statements and thoughts.

Often there is a pattern to such thoughts and we call these, "unhelpful thinking styles". One of the things we have noticed is that people use unhelpful thinking styles as an automatic habit. It is something that happens out of our awareness. However, when a person consistently and constantly uses some of these styles of thinking, they can often cause themselves a great deal of emotional distress. One of these thinking styles is called "black & white thinking".

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We call this all-or-nothing thinking, or black-and-white thinking because you will tend to see only one extreme or the other. With this thinking, you are either right or wrong, you are either good or bad - there are no inbetweens, no shades of grey, and no middle ground.

If you used this kind of thinking consistently, how do you think you'd start to feel? When we judge ourselves, others, or the situation, based on these extremes, without seeing the shades of grey in-between, it can be very easy to feel negative emotions, such as disappointment, frustration, anger, and anxiety if we think that we, or others, are not clearly in the desired category of "good" or "right" and so on.

Can you think of a situation where you have used this thinking style?

Briefly describe the situation.	What were the thoughts that went through your mind?	What feelings did you experience consequent to your thinking?



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