

Unhelpful Thinking Styles

Jumping To Conclusions

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 "jumping to conclusions".

Jumping to conclusions

Most of us would have heard the phrase "You're jumping to conclusions!" meaning that a conclusion is being made without really knowing if there is any evidence to support it. Although we might like to think that if we "have a hunch" about something it is usually right, there are times when we are not right. There are times that we keep jumping to the wrong conclusion, or the conclusions are usually negative. When we do this consistently then we can cause ourselves quite a bit of distress.

There are two ways in which we often jump to conclusions – mind reading and predictive thinking.

Mind reading

As the name suggests, this is where we jump to conclusions because we assume that we know what someone else is thinking, or we know the rationale behind someone else's behaviours. This happens to be a very common style of thinking.

Have you ever had this experience? You are talking to someone, and during the conversation they look at their watch? Perhaps you've thought, "they must think I'm a really boring person", or "they don't want to be here with me."

If you jumped to these conclusions without looking closely at all the evidence, such as the fact that the person is expecting an important phone call soon, do you think you'd end up feeling happy or distressed? Often these conclusions are a reflection of how we think about ourselves, eg, "I think I'm boring," "I think I'm not good enough", "I always do things wrong".

Often, we jump to the conclusion that because we think poorly of ourselves, then others must too.

Predictive thinking

We also jump to conclusions when we begin making predictions about what is going to happen on some future occasion, like we're gazing into a crystal ball. This is a very common way to increase anxiety and stress. These are often predictions where you overestimate the negative emotions or experiences you are going to encounter.

Think through this example. You're asked to give a talk to a group of people, and you think "I'm going to get in there and forget what I'm supposed to say, stumble over my words, and completely stuff up the presentation, and this will be terrible". You believe this despite the fact that you have delivered many successful presentations in the past. How might you feel if you believed this overprediction?

Can you think of a situation where you have used these thinking styles?

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