

Unhelpful Thinking Styles

Mental Filter

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 a "mental filter".

When we use a mental filter, we "filter in" some information, while we "filter out" other types of information. Although we might sometimes consider this a useful process by focusing on what we consider important, it can also become a sort of "tunnel vision" - where we focus on only one part of a situation and ignore the rest. Often, this means looking at the negative parts of a situation and forgetting the positive parts.

Here is an example: Maybe you are out with your partner having a romantic dinner, and at the end of dinner you have a disagreement about whether to leave a tip or not. Perhaps you stew on this disagreement in the car all the way home.

What do you think the effect of this thinking style will have on the way you feel?

Notice that in this example you are dwelling on a single detail out of the very many details that occurred during the entire night. Notice that the detail you are dwelling on happens to be negative. You have excluded other details of the whole picture, which means that you are not remembering all the other positive experiences of the night. If you focus on this negative bit, then it is likely that you'll keep experiencing the negative feelings that go along with it.



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?