



LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY
HEALTH

School of Medicine
Office of Physician Vitality

COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

Cognitive distortions are irrational thoughts that can influence your emotions. Everyone experiences cognitive distortions to some degree. However, if unchecked, they can take on a life of their own and lead to feelings of shame, anxiety, depression, and ultimately burnout.

Magnification and Catastrophizing: Exaggerating the importance of events or assuming the worst possible outcome. One might believe their own achievements are unimportant, or that their mistakes are excessively important.

Overgeneralization: Making broad interpretations from a single, or few events. “I feel awkward shadowing on the wards. I am *always* so awkward!”

Personalization: The belief that one is responsible for events outside their control. “My study partner is usually upset. He would probably be fine if I were smarter and a better student.”

Mind Reading: Interpreting the thoughts and beliefs of others without adequate evidence. “That resident looks at me funny. She probably thinks I’m stupid.”

Fortune Telling: The expectation that a situation will turn out badly without adequate evidence. “I know I’m going to fail this test!”

Emotional Reasoning: The assumption that things are as bad as the subjective feelings one has. “I feel horrible about my exam. I must have done horribly.”

Negativity Bias: Recognizing only the negative aspects of a situation while ignoring the positive. Failure to recognize and celebrate all that is going well or that one is successfully doing.

Pessimistic Explanatory Style: Reinforcing negative, difficult, or painful aspects in narratives. “Yeah, the nurse couldn’t follow orders. They don’t like students, have you noticed?”

All-or-Nothing Thinking: Thinking in absolutes such as “always,” “never,” or “every.” “I never do as well as I should.” (This contains two distortions).

Maladaptive Perfectionism: Repeatedly setting impossible achievement standards for oneself, leading to constant disappointment in oneself. This leads to embarrassment, shame, and depression.