

Even More Mind Traps

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Many feelings such as sadness, anxiety and anger are caused and kept alive by the conclusions that we make. Sometimes we make wrong conclusions over and over because we get stuck in mind traps that rob us of our ability to be logical. Here are even more thinking traps we can fall into.



Confirmation Bias

Trap: You believe something is true or likely to be true and you search only for evidence that supports the belief.

Example: You have a fear of something and you search the Internet only for evidence that the thing is dangerous, not for evidence that it may be safe.

Example: You believe what you read on your social media and you don't stop to realize your feeds are designed to give you what you'll like.

Escape: Remind yourself we all have blind spots and ask yourself where your blind spots are in relation to the specific belief or topic. Intentionally look for information both for and against your belief. Deliberately take a scientist approach and try to prove your belief is not true.

Cognitive Fusion

Trap: You have a thought, image, or emotion and you experience it as a fact rather than just words, pictures inside your head, or physical sensations.

Example: You think to yourself, "I'm not going to be able to cope" and you take that as a fact.

Example: You have an unpleasant image of yourself doing something and you conclude that means you want to do it.

Escape: Tell yourself, "I'm having the thought that I want to do this," or "I'm having an image of this," or "This is a feeling, not a fact." Ask yourself what you are experiencing through your senses. Practice observing your thoughts as just thoughts. Learn mindfulness.

Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

Trap: You think something bad is going to happen and your attempts to prevent it or protect yourself cause the feared outcome.

Example: You believe others at a party don't like you so you don't smile or make conversation and by the end of the evening they are wondering why you are so stuck up.

Escape: Remind yourself that you are a participant in your own experience. Pause and consider there is likely a difference between how you want a person to react to you and how that person will actually interpret you and react to you.

Polarization

Trap: When in disagreement with someone else, we tend to feel our position strongly and over time we experience the other person as more and more extreme than they actually are and vice versa.

Example: One parent is more strict (rule based), the other is more lenient (relationship based), and over time each becomes more extreme in their attempts to counterbalance the other.

Escape: Look for the kernel of truth or shared value that connects you. Work to understand the other person. If you're convinced you're right and the other person is stupid then recognize these are signs of arrogance and contempt.

Fallacy of Fairness (aka Just World Myth)

Trap: You believe that people get what they deserve, that good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people.

Example: If something bad happens to me it's because I deserve it, I need to be punished, I'm a bad person, I broke the rules, God is judging me.

Example: If something good happens to someone it's because they deserve it, they must have done something smart or kind, they must have followed the rules, etc.

Escape: Accept that this may be an ideal but the real world doesn't work like that. The rain falls on the just and the unjust.

Hindsight Bias

Trap: After an event has happened it seems so vivid that we tend to feel over-confident that we could have or should have seen it coming.

Example: You experience something traumatic and you blame yourself for not predicting and preventing it. Your car is hit by another car on the way to work and you're convinced you're to blame because you could have taken a different route but didn't.

Escape: Remind yourself we are real good at predicting the past. Consider the information that you had at the time you made the decision, not what you know after the fact. Consider other people and factors that were involved.

Cognitive distortions were originally described by Dr. A. Beck in 1963