



Train Your Brain Series: Week 2



Perception – The lens through which we view the world

Based on the experiences and relationships throughout our lives, we build our individual lens through which we view the world. This lens influences both thoughts about ourselves and others. It impacts our decisions and how we live our day-to-day lives. At times, when our lens is narrow or darker, we develop negative and illogical thoughts. These distortions may lead us down a damaging path both emotionally and physically. Exploration of our perception and scrutinizing the reasons why we think, feel, and act is the first step towards broadening and brightening our lens.

This week we are going to examine common cognitive distortions. These are irrational thoughts that can influence our emotions. Most important to note, we all have them! The crucial part is to not let those thoughts consume you. That is when they can become harmful. For example, perhaps you had a tragic event in your life and the fear of loss controls your perception of certain situations. Catastrophizing, for example, is a common distortion where we dwell on the worst possible outcome of a situation. This is not based on what will happen, only what, at absolute worst, could happen. It is okay to acknowledge that fear, but it is unhealthy to live there.

Review this list of Cognitive Distortions. Do you relate to any of them? Pick one distortion you want to address. As we go through the upcoming weeks, you will discover strategies to get yourself out of that cycle of thinking.

Magnification and Minimization: Exaggerating or minimizing the importance of events. One might believe their own achievements are unimportant, or that their mistakes are excessively important.

Catastrophizing: Seeing only the worst possible outcomes of a situation.

Overgeneralization: Making broad interpretations from a single or few events. "I felt awkward during my job interview. I am *always* so awkward."

Magical Thinking: The belief that acts will influence unrelated situations. "I am a good person—bad things shouldn't happen to me."

Personalization: The belief that one is responsible for events outside of their own control. "My mom is always upset. She would be fine if I did more to help her."

Jumping to Conclusions: Interpreting the meaning of a situation with little or no evidence.

Mind Reading: Interpreting the thoughts and beliefs of others without adequate evidence. "She would not go on a date with me. She probably thinks I'm ugly."

Fortune Telling: The expectation that a situation will turn out badly without adequate evidence.

Emotional Reasoning: The assumption that emotions reflect the way things really are. "I feel like a bad friend, therefore I must be a bad friend."

Disqualifying the Positive: Recognizing only the negative aspects of a situation while ignoring the positive. One might receive many compliments on an evaluation, but focus on the single piece of negative feedback.

"Should" Statements: The belief that things should be a certain way. "I should always be friendly."

All-or-Nothing Thinking: Thinking in absolutes such as "always", "never", or "every". "I *never* do a good enough job on anything."