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Unhelpful thinking styles explained

When we feel low, anxious or upset, it usually follows a run of unhelpful thoughts. These often fall into patterns, which we call **unhelpful thinking styles.** We slip into them out of habit, without noticing, and leaning on some of them a lot can cause real distress. As you read, you may spot some you use often. A few sound alike: they aren't separate boxes, just a way to see the patterns in your own thinking.



Mental filter

Tunnel vision: we fix on one part of a situation, usually the bad part, and forget the rest, so one bad detail colours the whole picture.



Should and must

Saying *"I should..."* or *"I must..."* can put unfair pressure on ourselves and others. Some shoulds help ("I shouldn't drive after drinking"), but many set standards no one could meet.



Jumping to conclusions

Deciding we know what someone is thinking *(mind reading),* or what will happen *(fortune telling),* without the facts to back it up.



Overgeneralising

Deciding one thing that happened is how things always go. Words like *"always", "never", "everyone"* and *"nobody"* are a sign.



Personalising

Blaming yourself for everything that goes wrong, even when it's only partly down to you, or not at all, as if you were responsible for things outside your control.



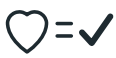
Labelling

Summing up ourselves or someone else in one word because of one moment, though plenty of times don't fit the label.



Catastrophising

Blowing things out of proportion: seeing a situation as terrible, awful or unbearable, when the problem itself is quite small.



Emotional reasoning

Taking a feeling as proof. The only reason to think something bad will happen, say, is that it feels as though it will.



Black and white thinking

Seeing only the two ends: right or wrong, good or bad, a success or a failure, with no grey in between.



Magnifying and minimising

Making other people's strengths look bigger and your own look smaller, as if you were explaining away the good in yourself.