Thought Distortions

*Adapted from www.getselfhelp.co.uk/unhelpful.htm*

**Mind reading**

When we assume we know what others are thinking. We may assume we know that people don’t like us, are looking at us or talking about us. We may overthink a situation that has happened, second guessing other people and what they think of us.

**Mental Filter**

When we see what anxiety wants us to see, we filter out anything positive and sponge up anything that’s negative. If you find yourself thinking very black and white statements such as “I completely messed that up” “Everything I do goes wrong” “Nobody likes me” then you are doing mental filter.

**Memories**

Sometimes things in the present can trigger memories or we may be anxious about something that has happened to us happening again. The thoughts become distorted when we believe that it will definitely happen again. In reality, we’re in a different situation, a different person and we have learned from our experiences, making us wiser and more resilient than we were in the previous situation.

**Emotional Reasoning**

When we feel anxious we can often assume that this because the situation is going to be awful. An example could be that you are due to meet a good friend but you feel anxious so you text to cancel. Emotions are temporary and just because you feel anxious does not mean meeting your friend will make your anxious or not be enjoyable.

**Shoulds and Musts**

Anxious people often think “I shouldn’t do that” “I shouldn’t have said that” “I mustn’t think like that” which puts instant pressure on ourselves. Shoulds and musts can be good for motivation e.g. I should post that letter, but if they are of a self-critical nature “I shouldn’t be so anxious” then they are unhelpful.

**Critical Self**

Anxiety can create an “internal bully” where we criticise and blame ourselves for everything, even things that are not our responsibility. This can easily overlap with “Mental Filter” and we begin to see ourselves and our abilities in a negative way, leading to low self-esteem.

**Compare and Despair**

Due to anxiety creating mostly negative thoughts, we can easily start comparing ourselves to other people and assuming they are better than us. Thoughts such as “they are so clever. I’m stupid” or “they look nicer than me. I look really ugly” are examples of compare and despair.

**Prediction and Catastrophizing**

Anxiety can make us ask a lot of “what if?” questions and try to predict what might happen. Our predictions are often negative and can easily become catastrophizing, where you predict the worst case scenario.