



Shifting Thinking Traps

Thinking traps are habitual and often inaccurate thought patterns that make your circumstances or problems seem worse than they are. You may fall into any one of them at one time or another. For the use of our exploration, think back over the past few days.

Which thinking trap do you most often fall into?



Personalizing *Instinctively* blaming yourself when things go wrong.



Externalizing *Instinctively* blaming other people or circumstances when things go wrong.



Magnifying + Minimizing Magnifying the bad and minimizing the good to let the negative take over and define a situation and your outlook.



Mind Reading Expecting others to know what you are thinking, without having to tell them.



Overgeneralizing Taking one piece of information and making a general rule about the world, another person, or yourself without evidence to support my findings.



Pessimism Taking a real problem and following an unlikely path to the worst-case scenario, and then getting stressed about it.



Emotional Reasoning Letting your thinking be led by your emotions and using your emotions as evidence that something is real.

To free yourself from a thinking trap, the first step is to learn to recognize when you are in one. You can then train yourself to observe your thoughts in times of stress.

Choose one instance when you fell in that thinking trap. What was happening at the time?

In what situations are you most vulnerable to this thinking trap?

Over the next few days, start paying more attention to what you say to yourself and to others. See if you catch yourself in a particular thinking trap, and when you do, ask yourself the following trap-specific questions to free yourself.

1. Personalizing

Ask yourself, "What's one thing that someone else did—or that circumstances created—that contributed to this problem, and what's one thing I can do about that?"

2. Externalizing

Ask yourself, "What's one thing that I did to contribute to this problem and one thing I can do about it right now?"

3. Magnifying + Minimizing

List three good things that happened to you today, and review the growing list each morning for ten days.

4. Mind Reading

Ask yourself, "Have I told this person exactly what I want or need?"

5. Overgeneralizing

Ask yourself, "Do I really have evidence to support such a general theory?"

6. Pessimism

Identify the triggering event; then ask yourself, "What's the probability that the end result will occur based on this one triggering event?"

7. Emotional Reasoning

Ask yourself, "Is a strong emotion causing me to jump to a conclusion?"

What is one action you can take to free yourself from a thinking trap that does not serve you?

Escape your thinking traps!

Your thoughts are not always accurate. And when you mistake them for a reflection of reality, they can make you think things are worse than they are. Practice-Practice-Practice freeing yourself from the seven thinking traps.