Assignment # 2

Unhelpful Thinking Habits

Over the years, we tend to get into unhelpful thinking habits such as those described below. We might favor some over others, and there might be some that seem far too familiar. Once you can identify your unhelpful thinking styles, you can start to notice them – they very often occur just before and during distressing situations. Once you can notice them, then that can help you to challenge or distance yourself from those thoughts, and see the situation in a different and more helpful way.

Identify which unhelpful thinking habits apply to you, then contemplate each question and write down your response.

1) **Filtering -** Filtering is characterized by a sort of tunnel vision, looking at only one element of a situation and excluding everything else. Through this selective perception, you magnify the significance of your flaws, faults and weaknesses.

*(Am I only noticing the bad stuff? Am I filtering out the positives? What would be more realistic?)*

2) **Judgments -** Making evaluations or judgments about events, ourselves, others, or the world, rather than describing what we actually see and have evidence for.

(*I’m making an evaluation about the situation or person. It’s how I make sense of the world, but that doesn’t mean my judgments are always right or helpful. Is there another perspective?)*

3) **Prediction -** Believing we know what’s going to happen in the future.

*(Am I thinking that I can predict the future? How likely is it that that might really happen?)*

4) **Emotional Reasoning -** I feel bad so it must be bad! I feel anxious, so I must be in danger.

*(Just because it feels bad, doesn’t necessary mean it is bad. My feelings are just a reaction to my thoughts – and thoughts are just automatic brain reflexes.)*

**5) Mind-Reading -** Mind reading involves projecting more into a situation than is actually there. You make snap judgments. You assume you know how others are feeling and what motivates them. And you make assumptions about how people are reacting to you.

*(Am I assuming I know what others are thinking? What’s the evidence? Those are my own thoughts, not theirs. Is there another, more balanced way of looking at it?)*

**7) Personalizing** - There are two kinds of personalization. The first involves directly comparing yourself with other people. The second is thinking that you’re completely and primarily responsible for everything bad that happens around you.

**(***Am I personalizing? What would be a more balanced and helpful way of looking at it?)*

**8) Over generalizing** - When over generalizing, you tend to make a universal conclusion based on a single event or very few factors, jumping from one instance to all instances in the future. Some words that indicate you may be over generalizing include every, none, never, always, everybody, and nobody.

**9) Magnifying** - If you magnify the negative, you’re likely to blow unpleasant events out of proportion and dwell on them. Small mistakes immediately become overwhelming failures. Simple constructive comments become scathing criticisms. You can’t let the thought go, and you keep replaying the event in your head. If you’re thinking this way, you might use words like huge, overwhelming, and impossible, along with a very pessimistic tone.

*(Am I exaggerating the bad stuff? How would someone else see it? What’s the bigger picture?)*

**10) Catastrophizing -** combines magnifying with over generalizing. It describes how people exaggerate the negatives in a real or imagined situation. This type of thinking often starts with What if..?

*(OK, thinking that the worst possible thing will definitely happen isn’t really helpful right now. What’s most likely to happen?)*

**11) Dichotomous Thinking** - This is also called black and white thinking. Dichotomous thinkers insist on either/or choices, looking at life at the extremes. You’re good or bad, worthy or unworthy, intelligent or stupid. Since your interpretations are extreme, your emotional reactions are extreme, too, from complete elation to deep despair.

**(***Things aren’t either totally white or totally black – there are shades of grey. Where is this on the* spectrum?)

**12) Shoulds and Musts -** In this pattern, you operate from a list of inflexible rules about how you, and other people, should act. Your rules are right and indisputable. Any deviation is bad. As a result, you often judge others and find fault. Your “Shoulds” are just as hard, and often harder, on you than on other people. Often you feel compelled to be or act a certain way. But you never ask objectively if it really makes sense.

*(Am I putting more pressure on myself, setting up expectations of myself that are almost impossible? What would be more realistic)?*

**13) Memories -** Current situations and events can trigger upsetting memories, leading us to believe that the danger is here and now, rather than in the past, causing us distress right now.

**(***This is just a reminder of the past. That was then, and this is now. Even though this memory makes me feel upset, it’s not actually happening again right now.)*