Common Irrational, Distorted, and Pessimistic Thinking Patterns

These thought patterns often keep us stuck in self-defeating or ineffective behavior patterns and make us unhappy.

**Perfectionism, Either/Or, or All or Nothing** thinking: Failing to see gray areas or compromises.
- I must be perfect at all things at all times, or else I’m a failure.
- Nothing is working out for me.

**Should Statements:** Unnecessarily criticizing yourself, others, or the world.
- I should have seen that coming.  I should have done that different.  I shouldn’t feel this way.
- He should treat me with more respect. I should get paid more.

**Over-Personalization:** Taking too much responsibility for your or other’s situations.
- Failing to consider role of environment (including other people) in a tough situation.
- Trying to fix other people’s problems.
- Believing other people’s criticisms are the truth rather than an opinion.

**Selective Attention or Mental Filter:** Minimizing positives and focusing instead on perceived negatives.
- The ‘A’ on that paper means nothing.  The instructor was an easy grader.
- I handled that situation horribly.  It was a complete disaster.

**Denial or Blaming:** Failing to accurately recognize your own role or capabilities in a situation.
- Trying to do too many things at once. Always being late or missing deadlines.
- Telling self that you’re helpless or hopeless in response to what life dishes out.
- Blaming others for your lack of efforts.

**False-permanence:** Thinking things are more permanent than they really are.
- Not forgiving self for mistakes – “I’ll never live this down.”
- Failing to remember that negative situations will let up or ever get better.

**Over-generalizing** or **Labeling:** A single event falsely becomes generalized to a larger pattern.
- My boyfriend broke up with me... I guess I’m not marriage material.
- Labeling self as ‘idiot,’ ‘failure,’ ‘loser,’ ‘downer,’ ‘ugly,’ ‘lazy,’ or ‘a depressive.’

**Catastrophizing** or **Can’t-Stand-Its:** Making things out to be worse than they really are (often to avoid them).
- Failing to also consider positive outcomes as possibilities.
- Telling self that negative past, present, or future event is worse than really is.

**Magical Thinking:** Telling self everything would be better if I was… wealthier, taller, thinner, better looking, etc.

**Emotional Reasoning:** Acting as though emotions are reality.
- I don’t feel motivated, so I don’t get out of bed.
- He didn’t like my performance, so it must have been lousy.

**Mind-Reading** or **Jumping to Conclusions:** Assuming what other people are thinking without really knowing.
- He doesn’t really care.
- She didn’t want to date me because she thought I was dorky.

**Double Standard:** Holding yourself to a different standard than you would apply to a good friend.
- Being especially hard on yourself and not cutting yourself the same breaks you afford others.

**Self-Centeredness:** Over focusing on self and ignoring how events relate to others, world, or spiritual universe.
- I was so nervous meeting him.  All I could think of was saying the wrong thing.
- I can’t go to the party.  I’ll look fat in this dress.

**Fallacy of Fairness:** Falsely believing things should always work out fairly.