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Cognitive Distortions from *Feeling Good* by Dr. David Burns

(1) All-or-nothing thinking: I see things in black-and-white categories. If my performance falls short of perfect, I see myself as a total failure.

(2) Over-generalization: I see a single negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat.

(3) Mental Filter: I pick out a single negative detail and dwell on it exclusively so that my vision of all reality becomes darkened, like a drop of ink that discolors the entire beaker of water.

(4) Disqualifying the positive: I reject positive experiences by insisting they “don’t count” for some reason or another. In this way I maintain a negative belief that is contradicted by everyday experiences.

(5) Jumping to conclusions: I make a negative interpretation even though there are no definite facts that support my conclusion.

(6) Mind reading: I arbitrarily conclude that someone is reacting negatively to me, and I don’t bother to check it out.

(7) Fortune Teller Error: I anticipate that things will turn out badly, and feel convinced it is an already established fact.

(8) Magnification (Catastrophizing): I exaggerate the importance of things such as my goof-ups or someone else’s accomplishments.

(9) Minimization: I inappropriately shrink things until they appear tiny such as my own desirable qualities or the other fellow’s imperfections. This is also called the “binocular trick.”

(10) Emotional reasoning: I assume that my negative emotions reflect reality: “I feel it, therefore it must be true.”

(11) Should statements: I try to motivate myself with “should” and “shouldn’t,” as if I had to be whipped and punished before I could be expected to do anything. “Must” and “ought” are also offenders. The emotional consequence is guilt. When I direct should statements to others, I feel anger, frustration and resentment.

(12) Labeling and mislabeling: This is an extreme form of over-generalization. Instead of describing my error, I attach a negative label to myself: “I am a moron!” When someone else’s behavior rubs me the wrong way, I attach a negative label to him: “He’s an idiot!” Mislabeled involves describing an event with language that is highly-colored and emotional loaded.

(13) Personalization: I see myself as the cause of some negative external event when, in fact, I am not primarily responsible for it.