**Education and Assessment  
Deceptions and Distortions**

**DECEPTION** in military terms means a strategy that seeks to deceive, trick or fool the enemy and create a false perception in a way that can be leveraged for a military advantage.

**DISTORTED THOUGHTS** deceive us and make us miserable. Cognitive therapy asserts that thoughts affect feelings which affect actions.

**Example:** A service person **thinks** *I should have died when my buddy died; I’ll never enjoy life again.*

* The service person **feels** depressed, guilty , hopeless and worthless.
* The service person **acts** in detrimental ways such as drinking or drugging to escape, driving recklessly, possibly attempting suicide, all because of thinking I don’ t deserve to live.

**Example:** A partner **thinks** the changes are very drastic: *I don’t even know the person I married.*

* The partner **feels** overwhelmed, unable to understand, scared.
* The partner **acts** standofﬁsh, fearful, irritated.

Distorted thoughts are your current enemy. They have been camouﬂaged but now you will recognize them.

Place a check or highlight the distortions that describe ways you usually think.

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| **DISTORTION** | EXAMPLE |
| **All or nothing**  **Or Black or white** | You see absolutes: right or wrong, good or bad, no middle ground, no gray areas. |
| **Overgeneralization** | You see a past failure or trauma as a never ending pattern of defeat or destruction. |
| **Mental Filter** | You dwell on negatives *Ex:*looking at coffee grounds and ignoring the coffee. |
| **Discounting the Positives** | You downplay accomplishments; you ignore productive possibilities of trauma. |
| **Jumping to Conclusions or Fortune Telling** | You are sure things are bad or will get worse, even though you have no proof. |
| **Mind Reading** | You are sure people are against you and thinking the worst about you. |
| **Magnification** | You blow things out of proportion, usually negative things. |
| **Minimization** | You blow off or ignore positive things, or hard issues you need to face. |
| **Emotional Reasoning** | You feel demolished and devastated now, so you decide you are ruined for life. |
| **Shoulda, Coulda, Woulda** | You criticize, and regret what should, could, would have been done or not done. |
| **Labeling** | You call yourself names or stereotype people who remind you of the enemy. |
| **Blame** | You blame yourself for events for which you were not entirely responsible, or you blame others when you have contributed to a situation. |
| **Catastrophizing** | You treat challenges as major disasters and expect the worst outcome. |
| **Excessive Self-Criticism** | You put yourself down: you are harder on yourself than you are on others. |
| **Making Demands** | You expect people to follow your orders – just as when you were in the military. |
| **Self-Fulfilling Prophecy** | You expect the worst from yourself and others, and usually get it. |
| **Personalization** | You think negative events are your fault or that things happen because of or in response to you, or to a situation you created. |

**Insight and Empowerment  
Deceptions and Distortions**

* Counterforce, a strategy used in nuclear warfare, targets military infrastructure.
* You can counter your cognitive distortions with positive but realistic thoughts.
* You are not expected to minimize the atrocities of war or the severity of your trauma.
* No magic cure exists to undo damage done to you and others.
* Different ways of thinking help you recover.
* Just as there are military police, you can be your own thought police.
* Prior examples show how your thoughts adversely affect your feelings and actions.
* The next examples and exercises show you how changing your thoughts will favorably affect your feelings and actions.

Read the negative example below; note the distortions, resultant feelings and actions.

* Thought: I was traumatized in combat and will never get over it.
* Distortions: Over-generalization, jumping to conclusions, fortune telling.
* Feelings: Discouragement and despair; no hope for recovery.
* Actions: Give up on yourself; refuse help or do not seek help.

Read the positive but realistic replacement thought below; note improved feelings and actions.

* Thought: I was exposed to trauma, but I can get therapy and learn ways to help myself.
* Feelings: Awareness, acceptance, empowerment, hope.
* Actions: Ask for treatment; join support groups; learn techniques for self-help.

**Troublesome Thoughts**

**Describe your most troublesome thoughts below; identify the distortions, resultant feelings and actions. Then replace each thought, noting the improvement in feelings and actions**:

1. **Negative Thought:**

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Distortions:

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Feelings:

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**Replacement Thought:**

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Feelings:

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1. **Negative Thought:**

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**Replacement Thought:**

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5. Decisive Point in military strategy is a geographic place, speciﬁc key event, critical system, or function that allows commanders to gain a marked advantage over an enemy and greatly inﬂuence the outcome of an attack.

* Your decisive point is now.
* What are the advantages of **cognitive counterforce** as illustrated by your replacement thoughts in numbers 1-4?

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6. Consider the following quotations.

Explain why you agree or disagree with each one, and apply each one to your life:

**The basis of optimism is sheer terror.**~ Oscar Wilde

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**Oh my friend, it’s not what they take away from you that counts. It’s what you do with what you have left.**~ Hubert Humphrey

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**Life is a shipwreck but we must not forget to sing in the lifeboats.**~ Voltaire

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**There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.**~ William Shakespeare

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