



## Cognitive Restructuring:

*Recognizing and Changing Cognitive Distortions*

### From “Seeing Rainbows: An Autism and Intimacy Educational Curriculum”

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While individuals on the autism spectrum perceive the world differently than their neurotypical peers, both at times can have distorted ways of thinking. However, the actual distortions can differ based on neurodevelopmental differences. For instance, someone on the autism spectrum might use *autistic logic*<sup>1</sup> to explain their decision making process surrounding a certain situation. While this logic may not make any sense whatsoever to an allistic<sup>2</sup> (non-autistic) person, it makes perfect sense to the autistic individual. Cognitive Restructuring has proven to be an effective method for challenging such cognitive distortions and considering other, more effective ways of thinking and communicating.<sup>3</sup>

- A. *The following is a list of cognitive distortions to review.*<sup>4</sup>
  - B. *Give a personal example of when you have used each cognitive distortion.*
  - C. *If applicable, discuss the following as they relate to any compulsive behavior (e.g., porn, sugar/food, gaming, work), avoidant behavior (e.g., avoiding social settings, sex, friendships, intimate relationships, personal hygiene, or self care), or other behavior you, your partner, or caregiver notices is an issue.*
  - D. *Discuss this assignment with your therapist, a safe person, and/or in your autism skills class or group.*
  - E. *Which cognitive distortion do you notice you use the most and why?*
  - F. *Pick one cognitive distortion that you use often and commit to being mindful of changing your thinking around it during the next week.*
  - E. *Celebrate your wins! When you notice and change your thinking, give yourself a compliment and share it with someone you trust.*
1. **All or nothing thinking:** Seeing things in black and white. *No rainbows, just black and white everywhere.*
  2. **Mental Filter:** Only focusing on the negative, not being able to see any positive. *No rainbows in sight. Ever.*

<sup>1</sup> Paxton, K., Estay, I.A. 2007. *Counselling People on the Autism Spectrum: A Practical Manual*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers. Philadelphia: PA.

<sup>2</sup> Divergent Minds. 2018. *What is Neurodiversity*. Retrieved from: [https://www.divergentminds.org/?page\\_id=64](https://www.divergentminds.org/?page_id=64)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Paxton, K., Estay, I.A., 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Paxton, K., Estay, I.A., 2007.

3. **Jumping to Conclusions:** Making a negative assumption without all the information. *The rain will never end or there will never be any rainbows.*
4. **Disqualifying the Positive:** Rejecting all positives, not being open to anything other than the negative in a situation. *I see a rainbow but it doesn't matter, it's still gloomy to me.*
5. **Mind Reading:** Assuming you know what others are thinking without verifying it with them. *Everyone thinks the rain is never going to stop too.*
6. **Fortune Telling:** Predicting something will turn out negatively without testing it to see what is true. *There will never be any rainbows. Just rain.*
7. **Catastrophizing or Minimizing:** Blowing negative things out of proportion or minimizing negative things. *Rainbows indicate that it's going to rain for days or they are stupid and mean nothing.*
8. **Emotional Reasoning:** Your emotions determine your logic. For example, if you feel bad, the situation is bad. If you should do something, then you are bad if you don't do it. *I feel sad so that rainbow is ugly.*
9. **Labelling/Mislabelling:** Overgeneralizing by using labels. For instance, if you don't get the raise you expected, you label yourself a loser. *The rain (or rainbow) must mean I am good or bad.*
10. **Blaming others:** Blaming others without seeing how you contributed to the problem/situation. *It's your fault that it's raining.*
11. **Personalization:** You blame yourself as the cause of negativity and consider it "luck" or see others as the reason for positive things. *I must be the cause of the rain.*
12. **Automatic "No":** You automatically say, "No!" to things without hearing a person's suggestion or idea. *No to rainbows!*