

What are thinking traps?

Common patterns that make things feel worse than they are, and how to catch them.

Our minds take shortcuts. When we're stressed, anxious, or low, these shortcuts can turn into thinking traps: habits of thought that aren't fully accurate and make us feel worse. Everyone falls into them. The goal is to notice them, not to never have them.

Eight common thinking traps

All-or-nothing

"If it's not perfect, it's a failure."

Catastrophizing

"This headache must be something serious."

Mind reading

"They didn't reply. They must be annoyed with me."

Fortune telling

"I'll definitely mess this up."

Overgeneralizing

"This always happens to me."

"Should" statements

"I should be able to handle this by now."

Emotional reasoning

"I feel useless, so I must be useless."

Discounting the good

"They only said that to be nice."

How to catch one

1

Notice a shift. Your mood drops, or you feel a sudden wave of worry, anger, or shame.

2

Ask what went through your mind. Write down the thought in your own words.

3

Name the trap. Labeling it creates a little distance from the thought.

A thought is not a fact. **It's one possible way of seeing things.**



Miriam Slikhanian
PSYCHOLOGIST

Catch it, check it, change it

When your mood shifts, write down what happened and work through the steps.

1 · SITUATION	2 · THOUGHT	3 · FEELING 0–100%
4 · THINKING TRAP	5 · BALANCED THOUGHT	6 · FEELING NOW 0–100%

1 · SITUATION	2 · THOUGHT	3 · FEELING 0–100%
4 · THINKING TRAP	5 · BALANCED THOUGHT	6 · FEELING NOW 0–100%

1 · SITUATION	2 · THOUGHT	3 · FEELING 0–100%
4 · THINKING TRAP	5 · BALANCED THOUGHT	6 · FEELING NOW 0–100%

Questions to help you check a thought

What's the evidence for and against it?

Is there another way to see this?

What would I tell a friend?

Will this matter in a year?

Am I falling into a thinking trap?

If you have OCD, don't use this to argue with obsessions. Checking the evidence can turn into reassurance-seeking. Work on OCD thoughts with a therapist.



Miriam Slikhanian
PSYCHOLOGIST