

## MANAGE ANXIETY - WHAT ARE YOU THINKING?

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Most of us go through life without even noticing the internal dialogue in our head because much of it goes on below our level of awareness. What we think and how we think affects the way we feel. Life always presents challenges and difficult situations. – it works like that between the good and peaceful times – but the way we process events in our minds can make the situation better or worse for ourselves.

Below are some examples of problematic needs and the thinking styles that go with them. See if any of these apply to you:-

### A. THE EXCESSIVE NEED FOR APPROVAL

Examples

1. *I must be liked by everyone I know*
2. *If people knew who I really was they would not like me.*
3. *Other's criticism proves that I am useless.*

The excessive need for approval leaves you unable to make clear decisions and set healthy boundaries. You can't say NO in case you lose people. You only have worth because others recognize you. This mindset also leads to **catastrophizing** – i.e. seeing things as far worse than they are. You say something silly and are convinced everyone thinks you are the biggest fool out. It also involves **minimization** ie dismissing what is good and focusing on the negative in yourself. All forms of faulty thinking also involve **overgeneralization** i.e. assuming that if something happens in one situation it applies to all.

### B. PERFECTIONISM

Examples

1. *I must be the best I can be in everything I undertake otherwise I am worthless and inadequate.*
2. *I am only worth the sum of my achievements*
3. *An achievement is not worth anything if I have not struggled for it.*
4. *I have only done enough when I am exhausted and can do no more.*
5. *It is terrible or unbearable if things are not the way I want them to be.*
6. *I will look a fool if I make a mistake.*

Perfectionism is a trap. Why? Because it can never be achieved. It is never good enough which leaves you unable to know when to stop – a bit like a rat on a treadmill. It leaves you never being able to appreciate who you are or what you do. Perfectionism involves **all or nothing thinking** (if it is not perfect it is useless).

### C. THE EXCESSIVE NEED FOR CONTROL

Examples

1. *There is a right and a wrong way to do everything*
2. *I need to plan for every eventuality.*
3. *It is terrible or unbearable if things are not the way I want them to be*
4. *If I don't do it nobody else will get it right.*
5. *Everything will fall apart if I don't keep an eye on it.*

A need for control can arise from many factors One of these is anxiety. When you are not able to control situations you may end up feeling angry, defeated and depressed. You may find yourself trying to manage most situations and people. We cannot control everything and you cannot ensure that nothing bad ever happens. All you can try to control is how you deal with situations. It involves acceptance that life is unpredictable and that change happens. It involves trust that you will be able to deal with things as they arise. The faulty thinking here are the **shoulds/oughts and musts** (I should be able to manage everything) and **all or nothing thinking**.

#### D. THE EXCESSIVE NEED FOR ADMIRATION

##### Examples

1. *Others should recognize how special I am*
2. *If others treat me unfairly they deserve bad things to happen to them*
3. *It feels terrible if people don't admire me*
4. *If I am not coping I am weak.*

An excessive need for admiration often arises from a low self esteem that may not even be recognized. The faulty thinking in this situation is **overestimation** of your talents, importance or contribution. It becomes very painful and can evoke enormous anger if others do not acknowledge this. This is also an example of **all or nothing** thinking.

#### E. THE NEED TO AVOID RESPONSIBILITY.

##### Examples

1. *Others should make life happy for me*
2. *If unpleasant things can be avoided I would rather do so*
3. *When I feel bad it is usually someone else's fault.*
4. *Circumstances are beyond my control*

We live in a world of people. We depend on each other and we need each other. However we also have to take some responsibility for our own lives and decisions, for how we behave and what we think. Not all of our feelings are *caused* by others and outside events.

As a start become aware of your thinking patterns. About how things work in all or nothings, about the "shoulds", about generalizing, about catastrophizing and about underestimating the good in a situation and selectively focusing on the mistakes you or others make. You may find situations feeling different if you can process them more realistically.