“Thinking Distortions” are patterns of thinking that so distort your thinking that your perceptions are not accurate. Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) calls these patterns “Stinkin Thinkin.” One of the functions of these thinking distortions is to avoid taking responsibility for your feeling and putting the responsibility for your feeling on others or the situation. It is important to realize that everything you feel and perceive is not completely accurate and not the “truth.” When you make others responsible for your feelings in order for you to feel better, you give up your power and your ability to change the situation. Remember the only person you can change is yourself. For more information on some of the “Anger Thinking Distortions” listed below, read Chapter 7 in The Anger Control Workbook by McKay and Rogers.

**Directions:** The “Thinking Distortions” are described below with some of the words that are used when you are thinking or expressing each pattern. Read each of the descriptions and write in the first column any of the patterns or words you use frequently. If you are not sure you use one of the “Thinking Distortions,” review Worksheets I, II, and III. Throughout the week listen to what you say to others and what you say to yourself about others to identify other words reflecting these thinking patterns. At the end of the week, identify what thinking distortions your frequently use.

| Blaming and Defensiveness | Blaming is how you protect yourself from what you do not like about yourself and your uncomfortable feelings. When you believe the other person is deliberately saying things to hurt or scare you, your anger and blaming increases as does your need to control the other person. When you are not able to control the other person, your fear escalates and so does your anger. When your anger gets out of control, you risk the possibility of threatening harm or harming the other person.

Blame is how you avoid facing your weakness and vulnerability and in the moment, you feel better. Being defensive and focusing on the other person’s behavior and faults, keeps you from taking responsibility for your behavior, feelings, and weaknesses. When you defend yourself, blame others, and get angry, you lose the ability to listen, learn, and grow.

As you begin to feel your sense of being threatened, listen to what you are saying to yourself and others. Being able hear what you are saying, increases your self-awareness and your ability to change your behavior. Key phrases and words to listen for are...**You always...you should...you never... if you...if it weren’t for you, I could have or would have...you made me...** and add your favorite phrases when you start blaming others.

| Global Negative Labeling | Global Negative Labeling is turning someone’s behavior that you do not like into a negative label defining the person’s character...**lazy, stupid, bitch, bastard, loser, jerk** and so on. These labels are a global negative judgment that does not describe specific behavior that the person may be able to change. Labeling the person, makes the person an object that you do not like, so it easier to be angry at this “worthless lazy object”. Many times general negative labels are grouped together...**you are a lazy, stupid bitch.** When you begin to characterize someone with many all encompassing negative labels, this person becomes more than worthless so it doesn’t matter how you treat them. You feel justified in saying more absolute, negative permanent labels which fuels your anger.

These labels are false and not an accurate description of this person. They become an excuse for you to treat this
person poorly so you do not have to face the parts of you that you don’t like, or your own feelings of being stupid. Listen to the labels you use to judge others and think about on how these labels describe a part of yourself that you do not want to recognize exists.

### All or Nothing

**All or Nothing** is when you view problems, behavior, or situations as being either absolutely perfect or totally and completely a failure. The either/or phrases are clues that your thinking may be all or nothing. An all or nothing view influences the person’s behavior as... *the house must be all clean at once or not at all...everything must be done perfectly or forget it, it is not worth doing.* Not all either/or statements reflect all or nothing thinking; such as deciding where to eat. All or nothing thinking views other’s behave as absolute and permanent... *you always, never, totally, completely...you never...you never will...and others.* Examples of combining the absolute and permanent language of all or nothing with global negative labeling are... *You are totally lazy...absolutely stupid...you are always a bitch... you will always be a loser...you will never change...and many more.* These absolute, permanent, global negative labels say to the other person, they are worthless. The all or nothing ignores the times when the person is not lazy, stupid, or a bitch. Since no one is always or never perfect or a failure, this type of thinking is not truthful and distorts the problem situation. The all or nothing perspective makes every problem and situation more intense and triggers angry and defensive statements that can escalate anger.

### Overgeneralizing

**Overgeneralizing** is when you respond to one problem, situation, or interaction as if it will always be this way and it will *never-end.* As you perceive this problem as never-ending, your ability to see the problem accurately declines and becomes more distorted. When your perception of this *never-ending* problem becomes more exaggerated, you turn this periodic problem into an ongoing event, and then, it becomes intolerable. Now your need to change this *never-ending problem,* increases, and so does your need to change the other person. When this person does not change, as you cannot change others, the problem becomes catastrophic and your anger starts to get out of control. You are now risking the possibility of threatening harm or harming the other person.

### Catastrophizing

**Catastrophizing** is exaggerating the importance of the problem, situation, or event. When you magnify the importance of the problem, your fear increases as “successful” the outcomes become so important that you fear you may not be able to deal effectively with the problem and your vulnerabilities will be exposed. The purpose of the distorted thinking described above is to protect you from feeling, acknowledging, or exposing your mistakes, weakness and vulnerabilities. When catastrophizing is combined with other distorted thinking patterns your fears intensifies, and therefore, your response and anger is more intense.

When you are catastrophizing, you use words such as *terrible, awful, horrible, terrifying,* and other extreme descriptions of the situation.
| **Jumping to Conclusions** | Jumping to Conclusions is making a negative interpretation when you do not know the facts or there are no facts that clearly support your conclusion. Mindreading is concluding or assuming that someone’s behavior, interpreted by you as negative, is about you. If you believe or feel this behavior is about you and you do not check it out, you start to relate to this person as if your assumptions about them are true. You are assuming that your negative feelings are accurate perceptions of the way things are… “I feel it so it is true.”

Another form of Jumping to Conclusions is anticipating that things will turn out badly or Fortune Telling. When you feel or believe that your prediction is fact, you begin to respond to the situation as if the negative prediction is occurring. These negative conclusions are reinforced by the “Distorted Thinking” patterns described above. |
| **Personalizing** | Personalizing is when you accept the “opinions and actions of others as the truth about you.”* What other people say about you is about their “reality, rules, and beliefs.”* When you swallow what other people say, you become hurt and angry which frequently triggers defensiveness and attacking behavior. When you are NOT personalizing, you can examine what others are saying, decide if you need to consider what they said, and/or get feedback from someone you know who will be honest and impeccable with their feedback. |

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For information on “Creating Coping Thoughts,” read Chapter 8 in The Anger Control Workbook by McKay and Rogers