

An interpretation of the set of irrational ideas by Ellis and Harper

Number	Interpretation	Irrational ideas
1	Needs approval	The idea that an individual must have the love and approval from all the individuals who they find significant in their life.
2	Fears failure	The idea that an individual must prove to be thoroughly competent, adequate and achieving and have talent/competence in some important area.
3	Labelling blame	The idea that when people act obnoxiously and unfairly towards an individual, they should be damned and be seen as undesirable people.
4	Catastrophising	The idea that individuals have to view things as awful, terrible, horrible and catastrophic when they get seriously frustrated, treated unfairly or rejected.
5	Managing feelings	The idea that an individual's emotional distress comes from external pressures and that they have little or no ability to control or change their feelings.
6	Anxious thoughts	The idea that if something appears to be dangerous and fearsome, the individual must pre-occupy and make themselves anxious about it.
7	Avoidance	The idea that an individual can more easily avoid facing many of life's difficulties and self-responsibilities than to undertake rewarding forms of self-discipline.
8	Past influences	The idea that an individual's past continues to strongly influence and determine an individual's feeling and behaviours of today.
9	Facing reality	The idea that individuals and things should turn out better than they do, and that it is appalling if good solutions are not found to the grim realities of life.
10	Passive existence	The idea that an individual can achieve maximum human happiness by inertia and inaction and by a passive and uncommitted existence.

Source: An adaptation from Ellis & Harper (1975). A New Guide to Rational Living

Note:

There are similarities between Ellis and Harper's irrational ideas, Beck's cognitive distortions and Burns' twisted thinking. A comparison of Beck's cognitive distortions and Burns' twisted thinking is summarised on the following page.

Comparison of Beck's 'Cognitive Distortions' and Burns' 'Twisted Thinking'

Number	Cognitive Distortions (Beck 1988, Love Is Never Enough, pp. 124-130)	Twisted Thinking (Burns 1990, The Feeling Good Handbook, pp. 8-11) (Burns 1980, Feeling Good, pp. 49-50)
1	Tunnel Vision Individuals see only what fits their attitude or state of mind, and tend to ignore what does not. There is a tendency to focus or seize upon a single small detail to interpret a whole event. Other important details are ignored, censored or minimised.	Mental Filter Individuals with a tendency to pick out and exclusively dwell on the negative details, thus perceiving the whole situation as negative, while ignoring the positives.
2	Selective Abstraction This distortion is related to tunnel vision (number 1) and involves taking a statement or event out of context and arriving at an erroneous interpretation.	
3	Arbitrary Inference This occurs when an individual's bias is so strong that an unfavourable judgement is made even though there is no basis for it.	Jumping to Conclusions (Fortune Teller Error) The individual arbitrarily predicts that things will turn out badly, and the individual is convinced this prediction is an already established fact.
4	Overgeneralisation These are absolute statements. Among the key terms which suggest overgeneralisation are all-or-nothing words such as <i>always</i> , <i>never</i> , <i>all</i> , <i>every</i> , and <i>none</i> .	Overgeneralisation A single negative event is viewed as a never-ending pattern of defeat usually described by words such as <i>always</i> or <i>never</i> .
5	Polarized Thinking Described as all-or-nothing thinking, there is no middle ground. Situations fall into categories such as either good or bad, black or white, possible or impossible, desirable or undesirable.	All-or-Nothing Thinking Individuals see things in absolute or black-and-white categories. If a situation falls short of perfect the individual interprets it as a total failure.
6	Magnification A tendency to exaggerate and to catastrophize a situation although in reality the implications are only mild or moderate.	Magnification or Minimization Individuals with a tendency to exaggerate the importance of issues out of proportion or to shrink the importance of issues inappropriately. Also known as the 'binocular trick.'
7	Biased Explanations These are negative attributions, finding unfavourable explanations for situation, events, or people.	Disqualifying the Positive Related to mental filter (number 1) the individual rejects positive experiences and accomplishments insisting that they don't count for some reason or other. The individual not only ignores positive experiences but transforms them into negatives.
8	Negative Labelling This distortion stems from the above negative attributions (number 7) and results in individuals attaching critical labels to situations, events or people.	Labelling and Mislabelling Personal labelling results when instead of describing a personal error, the individual creates a negative self image and attaches a negative label to themselves. Labelling may also be used to described other individuals. Mislabelling is when the individual describes an event with language that is highly coloured and emotionally charged.
9	Personalization These individuals habitually believe that the actions of others are directed at them.	Personalization and Blame The individual believes they are the cause of some external event which in fact they are not primarily responsible for or the individual incorrectly blames others.
10	Mind Reading The belief that an individual can tell what other people are thinking. Although at times the readings may be correct, this practice is very prone to error.	Jumping to Conclusions (Mind Reading) The individual, without checking it out, arbitrarily concludes that someone is reacting negatively towards them.
11	Subjective Reasoning The individual has the belief that because they feel strong emotion, it must be justified.	Emotional Reasoning Individuals reason from how they feel. The individual's emotions are interpreted as evidence for the truth.
12		"Should Statements" This involves self criticism or criticism of others. Criticism directed at self leads to guilt and frustration. Criticism at others leads to anger and frustration. Similar offending words include: "shouldn'ts," "musts," "oughts," and "have tos."

Source: Adapted from Dr Wayne Bovey DBA Thesis 1999