Thinking Traps

What are thinking traps?

Our minds allow us to predict, remember, organize, categorize, evaluate, and so much more. These cognitive processes make it possible for humans to do everything they do, from having conversations to building skyscrapers. But they can also lead us into mental traps that contribute to stress, disconnect us from others, and make our lives more difficult. These are called "thinking traps."

Examples of thinking traps

→ **Probability overestimation.** Overestimating the probability that something negative will happen.
Example: You believe that you're in danger of being fired despite no indication to support your belief.

→ **Catastrophizing**. Overestimating the consequences of something negative happening.
Example: You imagine that if you get a bad review or your project isn't approved, you won't be able to handle it.

→ **All-or-nothing thinking.** Seeing things in black-and–white ways. Things are either all good or all bad. There's no in-between.
Example: When a difficult situation arises, you only see the negative aspects and none of the solutions or opportunities that it presents.

→ **Should statements**. Rigid rules for how the world should operate and for how people (including yourself) should think, feel, and behave.
Examples: "Things shouldn't be this way." "I shouldn't feel so stressed."

→ **Personalization.** Overestimating your influence on negative events; taking things personally.
Example: When your partner is unhappy, you feel like it's all your fault.

→ **Mind-reading and fortune-telling.** Assuming you know what people are thinking, and what will happen in the future.
Examples: You're certain you know a colleague's or loved one's motivations. Or you're sure your children's lives will be unhappy if they don't get into the right school.

→ **"It's not fair."** Over-focusing on whether things are just, fair, or right.
Examples: "It's not fair that other people don't have the same health problems I do." "It's not right that someone else got the job I wanted."

→ **"If only…"** Over-focusing on an imagined outcome as the solution to all your problems.
Example: Getting a promotion, finding a partner.

→ **Emotional reasoning.** Basing your interpretation solely on your emotional reactions.
Example: "I feel anxious, therefore something bad must be happening."

→ **Thoughts are what they say they are.** Treating thoughts like facts.
Example: You think a friend is mad at you and therefore assume it's true.