

# 33 | Fifty Ways to Untwist Your Thinking

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### **Fifty Ways to Untwist Your Thinking: Basic Tools for Patients and Therapists\***

#### **1. Positive Reframing**

Focus on the negative thoughts and feelings in your Daily Mood Journal, one by one, and ask yourself two questions: (1) What are some advantages, or benefits, of this negative thought or feeling? (2) What does this negative thought or feeling show about me and my

core values that's beautiful, positive, or even awesome? List them on the Positive Reframing List.

## **2. Magic Dial**

After you complete positive reframing, imagine that you have a magic dial that would allow you to dial down each negative feeling to some lower level so you could preserve the positives associated with that feeling. Record these in the “% Goal” column of your Daily Mood Journal.

In other words, ask yourself how strongly you might want to feel each negative feeling on a scale from 0 (not at all) to 100 (the worst).

## **3. Straightforward Technique**

Try to substitute a more positive and realistic thought for each negative thought. Ask yourself, “Is this negative thought really true? Do I really believe it? Is there another way to look at the situation?”

## **Compassion-Based Techniques**

### **4. Double Standard Technique**

Instead of putting yourself down, talk to yourself in the same compassionate way you might talk to a dear friend who was upset. Ask yourself, “Would I say such harsh things to a friend with a similar problem? If not, why not? What would I say to him or her?”

## **Truth-Based Techniques**

### **5. Examine the Evidence**

Instead of assuming that your negative thought is true, examine the evidence for it. Ask yourself, “What are the facts? What do they show?”

### **6. Experimental Technique**

Do an experiment to test the validity of your negative thought in much the same way a scientist would test a theory. Ask yourself, “How could I test this negative thought to find out if it’s really true?” For example, if you believe you’re on the verge of losing control during a panic attack, you can test this belief by trying to drive yourself crazy through willful effort. You can roll around on the floor, flail your arms and legs in the air, and speak gibberish. It can be a relief to discover that you *can’t* go crazy, no matter how hard you try.

## **7. Survey Technique**

Conduct a survey to find out if your thoughts are realistic. Ask yourself, “How do other people think and feel about this? Could I ask some friends and get some feedback?” For example, if you believe that social anxiety is rare or shameful, you could simply ask several friends if they’ve ever felt that way.

## **8. Reattribution**

Instead of blaming yourself entirely for a problem, think about the many factors that contributed to it. Ask yourself, “What caused this problem? What did I contribute, and what did others contribute? What can I learn from the situation?”

# **Logic-Based Techniques**

## **9. Socratic Method**

Ask yourself questions that will show the inconsistencies in your negative thoughts. For example, you might ask yourself, “When I say that I’m a failure at life, do I mean that I fail at some things some of the time or at all things all the time?”

If you say, “some things some of the time,” then you can point out that this is true of all human beings. If you say, “all things all the time,” then you can point out that this isn’t true of anyone since no one fails at everything.

## **10. Thinking in Shades of Gray**

Instead of thinking about your problems in black-and-white categories, you can evaluate them in shades of gray. When things don't work out as well as you'd hoped, you can think of the experience as a partial success or a learning opportunity. Pinpoint your specific errors instead of writing yourself off as a total failure.

## Semantic Techniques

### 11. Semantic Method

Substitute language that's less colorful and emotionally loaded. Instead of thinking, "I *shouldn't* have made that mistake," you can tell yourself, "*It would be preferable if* I hadn't made that mistake." This method is especially helpful for should statements and labeling.

### 12. Let's Define Terms

When you label yourself as "inferior," a "fool," or a "loser," ask yourself what those labels mean. What's the definition of a fool or loser? When you try to define these terms, you'll discover there's no such thing. Foolish behavior exists, but "fools" and "losers" do not.

### 13. Be Specific

Stick with reality and avoid making global judgments about yourself. For example, instead of thinking of yourself as defective or worthless, focus on your *specific* flaws, errors, or weaknesses, as well as your *specific* strengths.

**14. Worst, Best, Average** is a combination of **be specific** (#13) plus **thinking in shades of gray** (#10), which I described in [chapter 21](#). It can be helpful for overgeneralization and labeling. Let's say you have a negative thought like "I'm a bad father" or "I'm a bad teacher." List five specific skills or characteristics of a "good father" or "good teacher," and then rate yourself in each specific area using a scale from 0 to 100 when you're at your worst, at your best, and on average.

You'll find that you're never at a 0 or 100 and that your ratings vary quite a bit from time to time. Then you can select a specific area

where you'd like to improve, such as "doing fun things with my son" or "being patient and supportive when my students are confused," and make a plan to improve in that area.

## **Quantitative Techniques**

### **15. Self-Monitoring**

Keep track of repetitious negative thoughts or anxiety-producing fantasies by counting them. You can keep an index card in your wallet or pocket and put a check mark on it each time you have a negative thought. Alternatively, you can wear a wrist counter, like the ones golfers use to keep track of their scores. Record the total number of negative thoughts each day on a calendar. Often, the upsetting thoughts will diminish or disappear within two to three weeks.

### **16. Negative Practice/Worry Breaks**

Schedule time to intentionally worry or criticize yourself. For example, if you constantly beat up on yourself because of your shortcomings, you can schedule several five-minute periods each day to berate yourself and feel miserable. At those times, you can be as self-critical as you want and rip yourself to shreds with gusto. Use the rest of your time for positive, productive living.

If you catch yourself worrying or criticizing yourself between those scheduled times, remind yourself that you can worry or criticize yourself during your next worry break. Then you can return to what you were doing.

## **Humor-Based Techniques**

### **17. Paradoxical Magnification**

Instead of trying to refute your negative thoughts, you can buy into them and exaggerate them. Try to make them as extreme as possible. For example, if you feel inferior, you could tell yourself, "Yes, it's true. In fact, I'm probably the most inferior person in

California at this time.” Paradoxically, this can sometimes provide objectivity and relief. Of course, if you’re really upset, this technique may have the unintended effect of making you feel even worse. If so, try another method.

## **18. Shame-Attacking Exercises**

If you suffer from shyness, you probably have intense fears of looking foolish in front of other people. Shame-attacking exercises are a specific and potent antidote to these kinds of fears. You intentionally do something foolish in public so you can get over this fear. For example, you could stand up and announce each stop on a bus or shout out the time in a crowded department store.

When you make a fool of yourself on purpose, you discover that the world doesn’t come to an end after all and that people don’t really look down on you. This discovery can be liberating.

## **Role-Play Techniques**

### **19. Externalization of Voices**

This technique transforms intellectual understanding into emotional change at the gut level. It’s the most powerful of all the CBT techniques, but it can be quite challenging and even a bit upsetting at first.

You and another person take turns playing the role of your negative thoughts and positive thoughts. The other person starts by playing the role of your negative thoughts. He or she will attack you by reading one of your negative thoughts to you while speaking in the second person (“you”). You start by playing the role of your positive thoughts, defending yourself and speaking in the first person (“I”). Use role reversals when you get stuck.

For example, if you have the thought “I’m a useless human being,” the other person will say, “You’re a useless human being.” The other person doesn’t just attack you by saying random, mean things—he or she only uses the negative thoughts from your Daily Mood

Journal to attack you. He or she goes through each negative thought one at a time and translates them into the second person (“you”).

When you defend yourself, you can use either the self-defense paradigm (arguing with the negative thought and pointing out that it’s distorted and incorrect), the acceptance paradox, or both. Then you can ask, “Who won? The negative self or the positive self?”

The goal is for the positive voice to win “huge.” If the positive voice does not win “huge,” keep doing role reversals. For this technique, a “small win” or a “big win” is not enough. We’re looking for “huge.”

## 20. Feared Fantasy

Like the externalization of voices, this is a two-person technique. You and the other person act out your worst fears, such as being rejected by an exceptionally hostile critic because you aren’t smart enough or good enough.

When you face your worst fear, you often gain liberation from it. Your worst fears don’t usually turn out to be real monsters but figments of your imagination that you can defeat with a little logic, compassion, and common sense.

## Other Role-Play Methods

Many techniques are much more effective in a role-play format. These include cognitive techniques like the **double standard technique** (#4) and the **acceptance paradox** (#21); motivational techniques like the **devil’s advocate** (#30); and exposure techniques like the **talk show host** (#43) and **flirting training** (#45). Interpersonal techniques, like the **five secrets of effective communication** (#49) and **one-minute drill** (#50), also work extremely well in a role-play format.

## Philosophical/Spiritual Techniques

### 21. Acceptance Paradox

Instead of defending against your own self-criticisms, you find truth in them and accept your shortcomings with tranquility. Tell yourself,

“It’s true that I have *many* inadequacies. In fact, there is very little, if anything, about me that couldn’t be improved considerably.”

## Visual Imaging Techniques

### 22. Time Projection

**Future Projection.** If you’re depressed, you can take a mental trip into the future and imagine that you’ve recovered. The current self who feels worthless and defeated can have a conversation with the future self who feels joy and self-esteem. The outpouring of emotion will often have a cathartic effect.

**Past Projection.** You can also take a mental trip into your past and have a conversation with someone who hurt or abused you. This will give you the chance to express the thoughts and feelings that have been bottled up and eating away at you for many years.

### 23. Humorous Imaging

When you feel consumed with anxiety or anger, it can sometimes help to visualize something humorous. For example, a woman with depression obsessed about the fact that she’d gotten screwed in her divorce settlement.

She could barely make ends meet and became furious every time she fanta-sized about her ex-husband cavorting with his new trophy wife on his yacht, living in the lap of luxury. The constant feelings of anger and resentment were making her miserable. She found that picturing him at a board meeting in his underpants made her giggle. This was a useful antidote to the feelings of rage that were plaguing her.

Of course, motivation is massively important with every technique. If she had wanted to be angry with her ex, the technique would not have worked. Whenever you’re angry, some positive reframing can be really helpful. List the many overwhelming benefits of being angry, as well as what your anger shows about you that’s positive and awesome.



Then ask yourself if you want to dial down your anger to some lower level or if you'd prefer to continue feeling really ticked off!

## 24. Cognitive Hypnosis

You'll need a therapist who uses hypnosis if you want to try this technique, and you'll have to be hypnotizable—which only includes about a third of us. After inducing a trance, the hypnotist may suggest that you're standing in a special library with two sets of shelves. The shelves on the left contain intensely negative books, like *The Book of Hopelessness* and *The Book of Despair*, and the shelves on the right contain positive books, like *The Book of Joy* and *The Book of Self-Esteem*.

When you take a book from the left shelf, you'll discover that it's about you. It contains descriptions of all your negative thoughts, memories, and fears. When you read from this book, you'll feel overwhelmed with feelings of depression, anxiety, hopelessness, and shame. Your hypnotist will guide you as you destroy this book. You can burn it, bury it, or shred it.

Then you'll find yourself in the library again, where you'll take a book from the right shelf. Once again, you'll discover that it's all about you, but this time, it's filled with positive messages of self-esteem, creativity, and optimism. As you read from this book, you'll be flooded with feelings of inner peace.

### Other Visual Imaging Techniques

**Cognitive flooding** (#39), **image substitution** (#40), and **memory rescripting** (#41) are also visual imaging techniques, but they're categorized as cognitive exposure techniques because they're extremely useful in the treatment of anxiety.

## Uncovering Techniques

### 25. Individual Downward Arrow

Draw a downward arrow under a negative thought in your Daily Mood Journal and ask yourself, "Why would it be upsetting to me if

this thought were true? What would it mean to me?” A new negative thought will come to mind. Write that new thought down under the arrow, and repeat this process several times. When you review the chain of negative thoughts, along with the list of common self-defeating beliefs, you can pinpoint the attitudes and beliefs that make you vulnerable to depression and anxiety, such as perfectionism, the achievement addiction, or the brushfire fallacy.

## **26. Interpersonal Downward Arrow**

This technique is similar to the individual downward arrow, but it's geared toward relationship problems. Draw a downward arrow under a negative thought in your Daily Mood Journal and ask yourself, “If this thought were true, what would it tell me about the type of person he or she is? The type of person I am? The type of relationship we have?” A new negative thought will come to mind. Write it down under the arrow, and repeat this process several times. This technique will help you uncover the self-defeating beliefs that lead to problems in your relationships with other people, such as entitlement, truth, or submissiveness. For example, perhaps you believe you need to hide your feelings in order to please other people because you think that their needs are far more important than your own.

## **27. What-If Technique**

This uncovering technique is another type of downward arrow technique, but it was developed specifically for anxiety. If you're struggling with anxiety, draw a downward arrow under a negative thought in your Daily Mood Journal and ask yourself, “What's the worst that could happen if that were true? What do I fear the most?”

A new negative thought or fantasy will come to mind. Write it down under the arrow and repeat this process several times. You'll generate additional thoughts that will lead to the fantasy that frightens you the most. Then you can ask yourself, “How likely is it that this will happen? And could I live with it if it did?”

You can also use cognitive flooding to imagine what you fear the most. Make yourself as anxious as possible for as long as possible.

Over time, your anxiety will diminish and disappear.

## **28. Hidden Emotion Technique**

This technique is based on the idea that when you're anxious, you may be avoiding a personal problem that you don't want to face. Bringing the problem to conscious awareness and expressing your feelings will often eliminate your anxiety. Ask yourself, "Am I focusing on my anxiety to avoid dealing with something upsetting? What's the real problem that's bothering me? Do I secretly resent my spouse or my job? Am I unhappy about being in school? How do I really feel?"

## **Motivational Techniques**

### **29. Straightforward and Paradoxical Cost-Benefit Analysis**

When you do a **straightforward** cost-benefit analysis, you list the advantages and disadvantages of a negative thought ("I'm such a loser") or self-defeating belief ("I should be perfect"). You can also do a cost-benefit analysis for a negative feeling (like anger, guilt, inferiority, or anxiety), a habit (such as drinking, using drugs, overeating, or procrastinating), or a relationship problem (such as blaming your spouse for your marital problems).

Ask yourself, "What are the advantages and disadvantages of this belief, feeling, or habit? How will it help me, and how will it hurt me?" After you list all the advantages and disadvantages, balance them against each other on a 100-point scale so you can see whether the costs or benefits are greater.

When you do a **paradoxical** cost-benefit analysis, you list only the *advantages* of a negative thought, belief, feeling, habit, or relationship problem. Now ask yourself, "Given all these advantages, why should I change?" This will make you aware of the powerful forces that keep you stuck.

### **30. Devil's Advocate Technique**

This is a role-play technique. First, you record the thoughts you have when tempted to give in to your habit or addiction. For example, if you struggle with overeating, you might be thinking:

1. Oh, that glazed donut looks *so good*.
2. I'll just have one little bite. That can't hurt!
3. I deserve it, I've had a hard day.
4. I can have a light dinner to make up for it.

Next, you identify the positive distortions in your tempting thoughts. The ten positive distortions are the mirror images of the ten negative distortions, and they're listed on the Checklist of Negative and Positive Distortions on [page 494](#).

For example, when you say, "I'll just have one little bite," you are discounting a lot of data to the contrary. This distortion is called **discounting the negative**. It triggers the urge to give in to your addiction and is the exact opposite of discounting the positive, a distortion that triggers depression. Next, you ask another person—it could be your therapist or a friend or family member—to play the role of the devil who tempts you to drink, overeat, procrastinate, or date the wrong person. Your job is to talk back to those thoughts in real time. Use role reversals when you get stuck.

For example, if you're struggling to stick with your diet, imagine that you're walking past your favorite bakery and you smell fresh donuts. The devil (played by your friend) might say, "Gee, why don't you go and get one of those warm, soft, glazed donuts? It would taste *so good*."

You can fight back and say, "I don't need a donut, and I'll feel terrible if I give in. I'm determined to stick with my diet, and I'm looking forward to fitting into more attractive clothes."

The devil will try to break you down again and say, "You deserve it! You've had a hard day."

Then you can fight back again.

This method can be surprisingly challenging, especially if the devil verbalizes your tempting thoughts in a seductive and persuasive manner.

When you are playing the role of the devil, try your hardest to persuade the other person to give in to the temptation. If he or she cannot defeat you, *do not* try to help. Instead, say something like, “It seems like you can’t convincingly defeat your tempting thoughts. Perhaps this is not something you really want to change. After all, you only live once, and a nice fresh glazed donut (or whatever tempts you) can be *so good!*”

### **31. Stimulus Control**

If you’re trying to break a bad habit, such as alcoholism or overeating, you can reduce temptation rather than struggle with it. For example, if you drink too much, you can get rid of all the alcoholic beverages in your house and avoid going to places where alcohol is served. Stimulus control is not a complete treatment for any addiction, but it can be an important part of a more comprehensive program.

### **32. Decision-Making Tool**

If you’re stuck on the horns of a dilemma, the decision-making tool can help you sort out your options and get unstuck. It won’t tell you what you *should* do, but it will show you what the real issues are and how you feel about them.

To use this technique, list all the possible options you’re deciding among, and then choose the best two. You can call them Option A and Option B. Then list all the advantages and disadvantages for both options. Once you’ve done that, you compare and contrast the advantages and disadvantages for each option to get a point total score for Option A and Option B. I’m developing an app that automatically walks you through the tool and automatically does all the calculations for you.

This app allows you to compare the total points for Option A and Option B. The option with the more positive number is more

desirable.

- If one option is strongly positive and the other is strongly negative, your decision is a no-brainer.
- If both numbers are positive, this is a can't lose decision.
- If both numbers are negative, it's a can't win decision
- If both numbers are around zero, it's a fence sitter.

A variety of other interesting patterns may also emerge. Remember that when you use the decision-making tool, you don't have to feel trapped or locked in by the results. You can fill it out on several occasions until you feel comfortable with your decision.

### **33. Daily Activity Schedule**

When you're depressed, everything seems overwhelming. Nothing seems worth doing, so you may give up on life. Creating a daily activity schedule can help you overcome do-nothingism. Record what you do each hour from the time you get up in the morning to the time you go to bed at night. Rate how satisfying each activity was on a scale from 0 (not at all satisfying) to 5 (the most satisfying). A review of the schedule will show you which activities boost your mood the most.

### **34. Pleasure-Predicting Sheet**

Schedule a series of activities with the potential for pleasure, learning, or personal growth. Indicate who you plan to do each activity with. Include activities you can do by yourself (such as jogging), as well as with other people. Predict how satisfying each activity will be on a scale from 0 (the least) to 100 (the most). After you complete each activity, record how satisfying it actually turned out to be on the same scale. Now compare your actual satisfaction ratings with your predictions. Many people with depression find that lots of activities turn out to be more rewarding than they predicted. This discovery can boost your motivation to become more actively involved in life again.

You can also compare the satisfaction you get from being alone to the satisfaction you feel from being with other people. This can help you test self-defeating beliefs such as, “If I’m alone, I’m bound to feel miserable.”

### **35. Anti-Procrastination Sheet**

Rather than telling yourself you have to do everything all at once, break down an overwhelming task into tiny steps that you can tackle one at a time. Create an anti-procrastination sheet by dividing a piece of paper into five columns. In the left-most column, list each step that you need to do in order to complete the task. In the next two columns, predict how difficult and how satisfying each step will be on a scale from 0 (not difficult/not satisfying) to 100 (very difficult/very satisfying). After completing each small step, record how difficult and how satisfying it turned out to be in the last two columns. Now compare your predictions with the outcome. Many people discover that each step is far easier and more rewarding than they expected.

### **Other Anti-Procrastination Techniques**

If you’re struggling with procrastination, and you’re telling yourself that you just can’t seem to get started, what you really mean is “I don’t want to get started.” If you’re feeling stuck, use the **Socratic method** (#9) to ask yourself a series of questions that will lead to the absurdity of your claim that you just “can’t” get started on a task you’ve been avoiding. First, break the task down into tiny steps. What’s the first thing you’d have to do? The second thing? Next, ask yourself, “What do I mean when I claim that I can’t do the first step? Or the second step?”

## **Classical Exposure Techniques**

### **36. Gradual Exposure and Flooding**

When you use **gradual exposure**, you expose yourself to the thing you fear in small steps. For example, if you have an elevator phobia, you could get on an elevator, go up one floor, and get off. Once

you're comfortable with that, you could ride the elevator for two floors and gradually increase the length of time you spend in the elevator. You can use gradual exposure for any phobia, such as a fear of heights, needles, or dogs, as well as other forms of anxiety, such as shyness or OCD.

You can also create a fear hierarchy, in which you make a list of the things that trigger your anxiety and rank them from least threatening (1) to most threatening (10). Every day, record the type and amount of exposure you perform on each item from your hierarchy, as well as how anxious you felt during the exposure, using a scale from 0 (not at all anxious) to 100 (the most anxious possible).

When you use **flooding**, you expose yourself to the thing you fear all at once. For example, if you have an elevator phobia, you can force yourself to get on an elevator and ride up and down, no matter how anxious you feel, until your fear disappears. Flooding is more frightening than gradual exposure, but it works more rapidly. In fact, I've treated a number of people with elevator phobias, and they all recovered in just a few minutes.

Both approaches have been used successfully in the treatment of nearly all forms of anxiety, so you can use the approach that appeals to you the most.

### **37. Response Prevention**

Response prevention is an important key to the treatment of all forms of anxiety. It's often combined with exposure. For example, let's say you have a powerful urge to check the mailbox over and over again after you drop a letter in. Using response prevention, you would drop the letter in the mailbox and walk away without checking it as you usually do. Your anxiety will temporarily get worse, and you'll feel compelled to check it. But if you refuse to give in to this urge, your anxiety will eventually disappear.

### **38. Distraction**

If you feel anxious, you can distract yourself from the upsetting thoughts by concentrating intensely on something else. For the best



results, you can combine distraction with gradual exposure or flooding. For example, if you feel panicky during an airplane flight, you can work on a crossword puzzle or engage the passenger next to you in conversation.

## **Cognitive Exposure Techniques**

### **39. Cognitive Flooding**

Cognitive flooding is useful when you can't expose yourself to the thing you fear in reality. For example, if you have a fear of flying, you can't expose yourself to an actual airplane crash in order to overcome your fears! However, you can confront this fear in your mind using cognitive flooding.

Visualize your worst fear, such as feeling trapped in a plane that's crashing toward the earth in a ball of flames while all the passengers scream in terror. Try to endure the anxiety for as long as you can. If you become panicky, don't fight it! Instead, try to make the panic even worse. Eventually, the anxiety will burn itself out because your body simply cannot create anxiety indefinitely.

### **40. Image Substitution**

Substitute a more positive or peaceful image for a frightening one. For example, during an airplane flight, you can fantasize landing safely or relaxing on a beach instead of imagining the plane crashing in flames.

### **41. Memory Rescripting**

If you've been a victim of sexual or physical abuse, you may experience flashbacks with vivid memories of the traumatic episode. These mental pictures can be likened to a horrifying internal movie that you play over and over again the same way every time. You can edit the frightening scenes in this movie in much the same way that you can change your negative thoughts.

For example, if your best buddy was killed by a hand grenade when you were fighting together in Vietnam, horrifying memories of his

body being blown apart may haunt you. You can bring him back to life in your mind and tell him all the things you never got to say before he died. Then you can give him a proper burial and say goodbye.

Changing the images can create a sense of mastery and help you overcome the feelings of helplessness that resulted from being a victim. In addition, the intentional exposure will desensitize you, and the traumatic memories will lose their power to intimidate you.

### **Other Cognitive Exposure Techniques**

**Negative practice/worry breaks** (#16), the **feared fantasy** (#20) and the **acceptance paradox** (#21) are all forms of cognitive exposure.

## **Interpersonal Exposure Techniques**

### **42. Smile and Hello Practice**

If you're shy, you can force yourself to smile and say hello to ten or twenty strangers each day. Use an index card to record how many people respond positively, neutrally, and negatively. You'll often discover that people are much friendlier than you expected. This discovery can help you overcome your fears of rejection or looking foolish.

### **43. Talk Show Host**

You can learn how to make casual conversation with anyone by using the **five secrets of effective communication** (#49), especially the disarming technique, inquiry, and stroking. These are the same skills used by successful talk show hosts like David Letterman and Jay Leno. They appear charming, personable, and relaxed because they always keep the spotlight on the other person.

Instead of trying to impress people by talking about yourself, you can focus on them in a friendly way. Find truth in what they say. Express curiosity and admiration. Ask questions and encourage

them to open up. You'll find that most people are somewhat bored and lonely, and they love to be the center of attention.

#### **44. Self-Disclosure**

Instead of shamefully hiding your feelings of shyness or nervousness in a social situation, you can disclose them openly. This technique requires a good sense of self-esteem to be effective. If it's done skillfully, it will allow you to form real relationships with people instead of trying to put on a show and pretend to be something that you're not. This technique is based on the rather unintuitive idea that shyness without shame is actually an asset because it makes you seem more human and personable.

#### **45. Flirting Training**

You learn to flirt in a playful, lighthearted way rather than interacting with others in such a formal, heavy manner. Paradoxically, when you lighten up and learn to stop taking people so seriously, they're more likely to find you attractive and may even start chasing you.

#### **46. Rejection Practice**

If you're shy and afraid of rejection, you can try to accumulate as many rejections as you can instead of trying so hard to find someone to love you. Although this takes tremendous courage, you'll discover that the world doesn't actually come to an end when you're rejected. Paradoxically, when you stop fearing rejection, you stop getting rejected.

### **Other Interpersonal Exposure Techniques**

**Shame-attacking exercises** (#18) are categorized as a humor-based technique, but they're also interpersonal exposure techniques. You can also use the **rejection feared fantasy**, which is a variation of the **feared fantasy** technique (#20). Let's say that you're intensely shy and afraid of rejection. You can enter an Alice-in-Wonderland nightmare world where your worst fears come true. A friend or therapist can play the role of the most rejecting, hostile person you

can imagine. He or she will be far worse than any real human being would ever be and will try to rip you to shreds. If you respond with the acceptance paradox, you'll discover that you can easily handle anything the hostile critic throws at you without getting perturbed. Use role reversals if you get stuck.

## **Interpersonal Techniques**

### **47. Blame/Relationship Cost-Benefit Analysis**

List the advantages and disadvantages of blaming the other person for the problems in your relationship. You'll discover that there are lots of advantages:

- You can feel morally superior.
- You won't have to examine your own role in the problem.
- You'll feel like truth is on your side.
- You can get back at the other person without feeling guilty.
- You can feel powerful.
- You can tell your friends what a loser the other person is, and they'll probably agree with you.

There may also be some disadvantages. You won't be able to resolve the problem or get close to the person you're mad at. The conflict will go on and on, and you'll feel consumed by feelings of frustration and anger. Your friends may get tired of your constant complaining. And there won't be any room for personal or spiritual growth.

Once you've listed all the advantages and disadvantages, balance them on a 100-point scale. Ask yourself whether the costs or the benefits of this mindset are greater. If you decide to keep blaming the other person, then the prognosis for the relationship will be extremely poor. Your willingness to stop blaming him or her and to examine your own role in the problem is the key to developing a more satisfying relationship.

## 48. Relationship Journal

The relationship journal can help you improve your relationships with family members, friends, and colleagues with these five steps:

**Step 1.** Write down one thing the other person said to you.

**Step 2.** Write down *exactly* what you said next.

**Step 3.** Analyze what you wrote down in Step 2. Was it an example of good or bad communication?

**Step 4.** Think about the consequences of what you wrote down in Step 2. How will the other person think and feel? What will he or she say next? Will your response make the situation better or worse?

**Step 5.** Generate a more effective response using the five secrets of effective communication.

## 49. Five Secrets of Effective Communication

The five secrets of effective communication can help you resolve virtually any relationship problem quickly. These techniques require considerable practice and must come from the heart or they'll backfire.

1. **The Disarming Technique.** Find some truth in what the other person is saying even if it seems totally unreasonable or unfair.
2. **Empathy.** Try to see the world through the other person's eyes. Paraphrase the other person's words (*thought empathy*) and acknowledge how the other person is probably feeling based on what he or she said (*feeling empathy*).
3. **Inquiry.** Ask gentle, probing questions to learn more about what the other person is thinking and feeling.
4. **"I Feel" Statements.** Express your own ideas and feelings in a direct, tactful manner. Use *I feel* statements (such as "I'm feeling upset") rather than *you* statements (such as "You're making me furious!")

5. **Stroking.** Convey an attitude of respect even if you feel angry with the other person. Find something genuinely positive to say even in the heat of battle.

## 50. One-Minute Drill

You and your partner take turns playing the roles of talker and listener. The talker spends 30 seconds expressing his or her feelings about a relationship problem. The listener paraphrases what the talker has said as accurately as possible. The talker rates the listener's accuracy from 0% to 100%. Once the listener receives a rating of 95% or better, you can do a role reversal.

This technique ensures nearly perfect communication. It quickly breaks the pattern of accusation, self-defense, and hostility, and it shifts the dialogue to a level of greater vulnerability and intimacy.

## Other Interpersonal Techniques

**Interpersonal Decision Making.** When you're at odds with someone, you have three choices: You can settle for the status quo, work to make the relationship better, or leave the person you're not getting along with. Most of the time, people know what they want, but sometimes it's confusing. You may ask yourself, "Should I get engaged or break up and look for someone more exciting?" or "Should I get divorced or try to make my marriage better?"

The **decision-making tool** (#32) can help you sort out your options when you're having a tough time making up your mind. A wide variety of patterns can emerge, and each one will lead to a unique solution.

## Checklist of Negative and Positive Distortions

This checklist contains definitions of the top ten cognitive distortions. The positive distortions are all exact mirror images of the negative distortions that trigger depression and anxiety. In contrast, the positive distortions trigger mania, addictions, narcissism, relationship conflicts, and violence.