Common Cognitive Distortions or “Thinking Traps”

All-or-Nothing Thinking
- What’s the point of coming to school anyway? I’m already failing a bunch of classes.
- Nobody ever asks me out on the weekends.
- I have no friends.
- It’s not worth even trying.

Jumping to Conclusions
- Mind-Reading
  - I know she doesn’t want to hang out.
  - Everyone is looking at me. They are thinking (negative assumption).
  - Don’t ask her, she will say “no” if we invite her.
- Fortune-Telling
  - My mom is going to be so pissed!
  - No one is going to understand me.
  - If I fail at ___ (school, sports, relationship), then I will never ____ (get into college, have a good career, get married).
  - I’m never going to be as successful as my brother.

Emotional Reasoning
- I hate being in school. I should just skip class today.
- I get so nervous; I’m never going to be able to make it on my own.
- I am worthless.
- I might as well have a drink before the test, I’m going to do really poorly anyway.
- I feel bad about this, that means I did something wrong.

Over-generalizing
- I’m always the last person to know what’s going on.
- Everything I do is a failure.
- I always mess things up.
- She never listens to me.
- This is all my fault!

Ignoring the Good
- The only reason she sat with me is that she had no one else to sit with.
- She’s my mother, of course she’s going to say something nice about me.
- Everyone did well on that test, it doesn’t mean anything.

Adapted from The Feeling Good Handbook by David Burns
Magnification (Catastrophizing)
- Today was a total failure. Nothing ever goes right for me.
- What if she never talks to me again?

“Should” Statements
- I should have known this would happen!
- I should never have said anything!
- I should never tell you anything.
- I should have known how to do __________.

Judging yourself Unfairly (often includes Labeling)
- I can’t believe I said that! I’m such an idiot!
- I’m going to do poorly on my exam and everyone will think I am dumb!
- When I try to dance, everyone is going to think I am an idiot.
- I don’t have any good ideas. I’m so stupid.

Accepting Helplessness
- I can’t do anything about it anyway.
- People never listen to me.
- Why bother?

Perfectionism
- This project is ruined!
- This isn’t good enough.
- It has to be better.