

COMMON THOUGHT PATTERNS

That Derail Resilience



We all have habitual thought patterns or "scripts" that run constantly in our minds and filter our reality in ways that are often counterproductive, limit our creativity, and derail our resilience. They can cause us to hold rigid views, react negatively to change, or dwell excessively on past events. By bringing awareness to these patterns and recognizing their influence, we can start to work with them more skillfully, which helps us better adapt to different situations, manage stress, and usher in fresh possibilities!

1. Assumptions: We learn from past experience, and based on that experience we sometimes think we know more than we know. We filter our perceptions of reality through those assumptions rather than seeing clearly what is actually true or needed now.

2. Projections: We assume that what we have learned is true for ourselves is true for other people as well. We project our assumptions onto them, usually without their knowledge or permission, abandoning theory of mind.

3. Objectification: We lose the sense of ourselves or another person as an active agent of changing experience. Instead we see ourselves (and others) as an object, a thing, an "It" at the mercy of external events and other people's choices, powerless to change our experience (or our responses to it).

4. Mind Reading: We presume we know what another person is thinking, feeling, or needing without empathically checking with them. Or we may presume that the other person already knows what we think or need without bothering to tell them directly: "If you loved me, you would know how I feel."

5. Discounting the Positive: We fail to register positive traits in ourselves or in others, belittling ourselves, devaluing others, and deflecting or neglecting appreciation in either direction.

6. Overgeneralizing: We may exaggerate attributes of an experience, perceiving things as global and pervasive, applying to everything and everybody; we see things as “always” or “never.” We may take things personally whether or not that’s true or relevant, seeing things as permanent and unchanging. (This overgeneralizing is known as the three Ps: pervasive, personal, permanent.)

7. Catastrophizing: We may immediately assume the worst: if we sneeze, we assume we’re catching a cold, which means missing work for three weeks, which means losing the job, which means losing our home — from sniffle to disaster in less than three seconds.

8. Black-and-White Thinking: We see everything in categorical terms, with no shades of gray, few options, and no possibilities of compromise. This rigidity in thinking, which can lead to a serious derailing of response flexibility, is also known as neural cement.

9. Inability to Disconfirm: We are so rigid in our opinions that no new information can change them. You may recognize similar patterns in your thinking.

SOURCE: “Resilience” by Linda Graham, MFT