



## Jumping to Conclusions

For the last couple of weeks as part of the Mental Health Notes, we have looked at common types of cognitive distortions – ‘Black and White Thinking’ and ‘Mental Filter’. These unhelpful thinking patterns impact on how we think, feel and act. Today we will consider a third type of cognitive distortion – **Jumping to Conclusions**.

Jumping to conclusions is a type of cognitive distortion where we make interpretations without having the facts to support them. For some, the ‘Jumping-to-conclusions’ mindset is similar to owning a crystal ball that predicts only misery. If you had such a crystal ball you would throw it away, as there is no good reason to keep such a negative way of thinking.

**Jumping to conclusions** can take different forms – **mind reading**, where we think we can read people’s minds and conclude they are thinking badly of us without bothering to check this out; and **fortune telling**, when we think things will turn out badly and treat this opinion as an established fact.

Consider the example of Diane who has good relationships with her co-workers. Despite this she believes that they don’t see her as being as smart or as capable as the rest of the office. Diane was recently assigned an important project that she was excited to work on. However, she has been telling herself “They all think I’m incapable. I just *know* I will make a mistake and ruin this entire project.”

Diane’s negative thoughts are not based on facts. She is reading the minds of her co-workers and predicting disaster as a result of her part in the project. She could challenge her thoughts and consider what evidence there is that her co-workers look down on her or that this project will fail. The fact that the project was assigned to her indicates the opposite, that she is in fact respected and others expect her to succeed. She can also tell herself that she will do her very best on this project and even if a mistake is made it doesn’t mean it will automatically be a disaster and she still has the opportunity to learn from it.

When you find yourself mind reading and fortune telling, you can get rid of a big portion of anxiety and negativity by reminding yourself not to jump to conclusions. There are some exercises that help you to stop jumping to conclusions. Use **thought stopping**; every time your mind tries to give you a negative outcome, try to stop it, as you don’t yet know the outcome. This takes practice. Try to **check all the facts** and don’t automatically assume negative outcomes, e.g. *I might get rejected from time to time, but there are many people who enjoy my company*. You can **reframe your thinking** in a more positive way by finding proof of how your mind was wrong in the past. Remind yourself of all the situations where you got a positive response, even though you anticipated a negative outcome, e.g. *you got a lot of praise for something that you did*.

Jumping to negative conclusions is an unhelpful form of thinking. However, it’s also important not to go to another extreme of having unrealistic expectations that everything will happen without any challenges. From time to time, life presents obstacles, e.g. sometimes relationships don’t work out or you don’t get the promotion you expected. In these times of stress, the human brain has a tendency to engage in unhelpful thinking. Being mindful to have **realistic expectations and focus on the facts**, without jumping to conclusions, is a more helpful way of thinking.