

NEBRASKA LICENSEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

A SERVICE OF BEST CARE EAP

STINKIN' THINKIN' (Part II)

As a reminder from the June NE LAP newsletter, Stinkin' Thinkin' is a term used by David Burns, M.D, a psychiatrist and author of *The Feeling Good Handbook*, to refer to those that have reverted to old patterns of thinking while in recovery. Below are the last five negative thinking patterns that can jeopardize a healthcare professional's recovery from Dr. Burns' *The Feeling Good Handbook*.

6. Magnification - You exaggerate the importance of your problems and shortcomings, or you minimize the importance of your desirable qualities. This is also called the "binocular trick."

7. Emotional Reasoning - You assume that your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are: "I feel terrified about going on airplanes. It must be very dangerous to fly." Or, "I feel guilty. I must be a rotten person." Or, "I feel angry. This proves that I'm being treated unfairly." Or, "I feel so inferior. This means I'm a second rate person." Or, "I feel hopeless. I must really be hopeless."

8. "Should" statements - You tell yourself that things should be the way you hoped or expected them to be. After playing a difficult piece on the piano, a gifted pianist told herself, "I shouldn't have made so many mistakes." This made her feel so disgusted that she quit practicing for several days. "Musts," "ought's" and "have to's" are similar offenders.

"Should statements" that are directed against yourself lead to guilt and frustration. Should statements that are directed against other people or the world in general, lead to anger and frustration: "He shouldn't be so stubborn and argumentative!"

9. Labeling - Labeling is an extreme form of all-or-nothing thinking. Instead of saying "I made a mistake," you attach a negative label to yourself: "I'm a loser." You might also label yourself "a fool" or "a failure" or "a jerk." Labeling is quite irrational because you are not the same as what you do. Human beings exist, but "fools," "losers" and "jerks" do not. These labels are just useless abstractions that lead to anger, anxiety, frustration and low self-esteem.

You may also label others. When someone does something that rubs you the wrong way, you may tell yourself: "He's an S.O.B." Then you feel that the problem is with that person's "character" or "essence" instead of with their thinking or behavior. You see them as totally bad. This makes you feel hostile and hopeless about improving things and leaves very little room for constructive communication.

10. Personalization and Blame - Personalization comes when you hold yourself personally responsible for an event that isn't entirely under your control. When a woman received a note that her child was having difficulty in school, she told herself, "This shows what a bad mother I am," instead of trying to pinpoint the cause of the problem so that she could be helpful to her child. When another woman's husband beat her, she told herself, "If only I was better in bed, he wouldn't beat me." Personalization leads to guilt, shame and feelings of inadequacy.

Some people do the opposite. They blame other people or their circumstances for their problems, and they overlook ways they might be contributing to the problem: "The reason my marriage is so lousy is because my spouse is totally unreasonable." Blame usually doesn't work very well because other people will resent being scapegoated and they will just toss the blame right back in your lap. It's like the game of hot potato--no one wants to get stuck with it.

If you are a licensed health or health-related service professional wanting more information about sobriety and recovery, please contact the NE LAP at (800) 851-2336 or (402) 354-8055 or visit our web site at www.lapne.org. If you would like to consult with the NE LAP, or schedule an assessment or an educational presentation, please ask for Michelle Hruska, NE LAP Coordinator, or Nicole Winkler, NE LAP Counselor. September 2019