Cognitive Distortions

Cognitive Distortions (CDs) are ways of thinking and seeing things that make you think in the negative. Below is a list of common CDs people experience.

Directions: Circle any of the CDs below that resonate with you. Reflect on how they have affected your life.

All or none (always or never) thinking. Pattern of thinking in extremes.
Example: "This never works for me!" or "I always mess things up!"

Labeling. Labeling someone or something based off of one or few incidents and allowing that label to affect how we interpret interactions with the person or thing.
Example: "I am terrible at math." or "He is a bad man."

Focusing on the negative/Filtering. Focusing on the negative events and not giving credit to the positive events.
Example: (Winning 3 out of 4 tennis matches) "I blew it on that last match!"

The "shoulds". Focusing on what you believe should be, rather than what is.
Example: "I should be able to handle this on my own." or "This shouldn't be happening to me at this age."

Blaming. Blaming ourselves for things that are outside of our control OR blaming other people or forces to avoid taking responsibility for your actions.
Example: "I should have known the dog was sick." or "He shouldn't have prompted me to punch him."

Predicting the future. Assuming the outcome of a situation.
Example: "I know she won't want me there so I cannot go."

Overgeneralization. Generalizing an impression based on a few instances.
Example: A woman in an abusive situation. "All men are dangerous and will hurt me."

Mind reading. Assuming you know what other people are thinking.
Example: Being the shy kid in class. "Everyone thinks I am a loser."

Catastrophizing. Expecting the worst to happen.
Example: Day 1 of Physics class. "I am so nervous I know I am going to fail this class!"

Emotional reasoning. Letting your emotions fuel your understanding of a situation.
Example: Feeling hurt after a breakup. "I am unlovable. I will be alone forever."

Personalization. Taking something that doesn't have to do with you and making it about you.
Example: Someone is rude to you in the store. "He just hates me because I am ___."

Jumping to conclusions. Making assumptions about a situation without knowing all of the objective facts.
Example: "Jill didn't come to my party because she's still mad that I hit her car."