

# 12 Strategies to Help You Say Goodbye to All-or-Nothing Thinking

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If you're feeling depressed or anxious, it may be a matter of how you look at the world. All-or-nothing thinking can make you feel like a victim of circumstances and cause emotional swings.

One day you think your marriage was made in heaven. The next you want to call a divorce lawyer. You start the week loving your job because you gave a successful presentation. On Friday, you're debating whether to resign because you had an argument with your boss.

**Psychologists call it dichotomous thinking.** It's what happens when you take a specific event and turn it into a global generalization.

**Learning to replace exaggerated thoughts with more realistic assessments will help you to deal with setbacks and feel more hopeful about the future.**

Practice these steps for overcoming polarized thinking.

### Simple Steps to Overcome Polarized Thinking

When all or nothing thinking becomes chronic, it can have far reaching effects on your life. However, there are simple actions you can take each day to gradually achieve more moderation.

**Try these techniques:**

1. **Change your vocabulary.** Speaking in unconditional terms reinforces all-or-nothing thinking. **Try replacing words like *always* and *everyone* with descriptions that are closer to the facts.**

2. **Take an inventory.** Give yourself more credit if a single setback is blinding you to your overall track record. Remember the many things you have already accomplished.
  
3. **Accentuate the positive. Black and white thinking tends to be pessimistic.**  
Take time to count your blessings and notice the things you like in yourself and others.
  
4. **Set realistic expectations.** Create goals you can achieve instead of trying to be a superhero. Consider your abilities and resources.
  
5. **Celebrate small victories.** Take satisfaction in making progress. Cleaning out one closet is a step closer to putting your house in order.
  
6. **Narrow your focus. Try changing your perspective about one area in your life, and the rest will probably follow.** You might want to concentrate on your relationships or your health.
  
7. **Ask for feedback.** If you have trouble recognizing when you're exaggerating, ask friends and family for feedback. They may be able to see things more clearly than you do.

### **Advanced Steps to Overcome Polarized Thinking**

It's easy to become stuck when you engage in black or white thinking. You may need to take additional steps if you feel trapped in a cycle you want to break.

**Follow these strategies for additional steps:**

1. **See things through.** Do you abandon projects unless they deliver the exact results you were seeking? You'll be happier and more productive if you can train yourself to be flexible and tolerate frustration. **Try to identify the successful elements of any operation and learn from experience.**
2. **Take risks.** All-or-nothing thinking saps your motivation when you believe that your efforts would be futile. Surprise yourself by seizing more opportunities and watching some of them pay off.
3. **Meditate and reflect.** If your way of thinking has been holding you back, you may need to contemplate how you see yourself and others. Figure out your personal priorities and values.
4. **Make specific plans.** To build a brighter future, you need a plan to follow. Once you have a list of positive changes you want to make, **identify the obstacles you'll face and what you'll do to overcome them.**
5. **Seek counseling.** All-or-nothing thinking can sometimes be traced back to childhood events, so you may need help to sort out the past and move on. Ask your physician for a referral or check your local psychological association for therapists who specialize in cognitive distortions.

When you recognize that most events and creatures including yourself are a mixture of positive and negative qualities, you'll be able to make more rational decisions. Free yourself from all-or-nothing thinking so you can enjoy more happiness and success.