

THERAPY

by

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lights up in a meeting room. CLEO, DAVID, MO, & CARRIE are all sitting down away from PATTISON. PATTISON is impatient, watching the clock like a madman, constantly tapping his foot.

CARRIE  
My grandma died!

PATTISON  
I'm so sorry Carrie.

CLEO  
Is this legal?

MO  
If you're not a narc it is.

CLEO  
This doesn't feel right, I don't think the space is safe enough for me.

MO  
Are you being abused?

CLEO  
What? No?

MO  
Are you abusing someone who has a legal guardian?

CLEO  
No! Why are you—

MO  
Then according to HIPPA you can't snitch.

PATTISON  
Well, it's a little more complicated than that but—

MO gives him a blank look that somehow stops him in his tracks. A long, awkward pause ensues before he picks his thoughts back up.

PATTISON  
Anyways... How are you coping with her death?

CARRIE

I mean, I get her couch so I'm doing pretty good! I needed to furnish my new place too.

MO

Atta girl.

PATTISON

Oh, ok... Thank you for checking in! How about you, David?

DAVID doesn't respond, he's in a fixed position leaned over holding his head. MO lightly kicks his calf. When he finally wakes up, he lets out a gasp loud enough to wake the dead.

DAVID

I was praying.

PATTISON

Are you sure? You must have been pretty focused there.

DAVID

Amen.

DAVID goes back to "praying"

CLEO

This is insane, I want my money back. I want Jo back!

PATTISON

I promise you Jo will be back after maternity leave

DAVID pops up for a second, very drowsily

DAVID

Jo isn't a man?

PATTISON

You've been in this group for five weeks- anyways-

DAVID

I don't see sex.

Everyone turns and looks at him perplexed, PATTISON begins to hand out individual worksheets, they all take one and pass it down to the next person.

PATTISON

So, as you all have heard; Jo is on maternity leave for a little bit

MO

little bit is the biggest lie I've ever heard

PATTISON

so I'll be taking over for the time being. I can assure you that I am qualified to be facilitating these groups.

CLEO

How long have you been working here?

PATTISON

... 5 weeks.

CLEO

Aren't you a student?

PATTISON

I'm an intern.

CLEO

Paid?

PATTISON

No.

CLEO

Ok s-

PATTISON

So let's get into the topic for today: Types of cognitive distortion. for each one, what we're gonna do is-

CLEO

I don't feel listened to.

PATTISON WITH STRAINED SMILE

What?

CLEO  
I feel invalidated right now.

PATTISON  
I understand Cleo, can you please let me finish the explanation and then we can talk about it?

CLEO  
You cut me off. Let me call Jo, she can at least pick up the phone right?

MO  
I'm surprised you're a woman sometimes.

CLEO  
If not Jo, then your boss, or your boss's boss since Jo is gone.

CARRIE  
Oh just give him a second, I mean, we're all learning throughout our entire lives!

MO  
Carrie, I love you but your smile looks like it's gonna crack into three different pieces. It looks so strained.

CARRIE slowly turns to MO

CARRIE  
What do you mean?

MO  
Never mind.

PATTISON  
Ok, so can we all read at least one of the types of cognitive distortions?

CARRIE  
Hm?

CLEO

What?

MO

Who?

DAVID lets out the biggest snore

PATTISON

Was nobody listening?

They all do a slam poetry/round table "mmmmmmmm".

PATTISON

Ok, let's start from the top of  
the speel-

ALL EXCEPT DAVID AND PATTISON

Nonono we understand!

PATTISON

Who wants to go first then?

MO

Cleo would love to start us off  
since you're so attentive and miss  
Jo, right?

CLEO

Oh! Yeah you know I feel really,  
horrifyingly, just awful about the  
whole subject- I mean it's had a  
big impact on such a large group  
of people- I know plenty of people  
who have been affected by it, not  
to downplay the aftermath of it,  
but just to say that it's a big  
issue that many people are working  
on to fix, myself included, and it  
just really, really, like, I mean  
it's such tough thing to deal  
with. Oh how tough it's gotta be,  
how tough, I can't even imagine  
having to, to deal with it you  
know? Yeah... Did that make sense?

PATTISON

No. It did not.

CLEO

Yeah, sorry, it's just such a heavy subject that—

PATTISON

Read the first paragraph on the handout please.

CLEO

Understood. It says here:  
"Cognitive distortions are irrational thoughts that shape how you see the world, how you feel, and how you act. It's normal to have these thoughts occasionally, but they can be harmful when frequent or extreme."

PATTISON

Any thoughts on that piece?

CLEO

I mean, as I was saying, it sounds pretty terrible, I mean really—

Everyone is staring at her like they're trying to tell her she can't save herself from the mistake she made.

CLEO

Yeah.

PATTISON

Carrie, can you read the first distortion for us please?

CARRIE

Sure! "Magnification and minimization: Exaggerating or minimizing the importance of events. You might believe your own achievements are unimportant or that your mistakes are excessively important."

PATTISON

Does that feel familiar to anyone?

Carrie raises her hand.

CARRIE

Yeah, I tend to be a perfectionist!

PATTISON

Thanks for sharing, Carrie; and in that perfectionism do you tend to scrutinize yourself and others more than other people?

CARRIE

I wouldn't say other people, mostly just me, I put way too much pressure on myself and exaggerate my mistakes I guess. I don't give myself as much breathing room as I give others, which I like to think is a lot. I-

MO chucks a paper airplane at DAVID, making him wake up suddenly. Carrie gets scared and loses it. PATTISON is trying to calm her down the entire speech.

DAVID

HALLELU!!!!

CARRIE

WOULD YOU STOP INTERRUPTING DAVID!! Jesus Christ, you know I thought we were all here to learn. Weren't we? How much money do you guys put aside to waste on insurance copays?? Cleo sits here trying to start a problem every class like she's always been wronged every step she's taken in her "overly traumatic" life

CLEO

I didn't say anything!

CARRIE

David's just fucking sleeping, why wouldn't you just stay IN BED???

DAVID

I need a good place to meditate...

CARRIE

Mo just makes other people talk and makes her problems feel less because other people have worse lives

MO

What did you just say to me bitch?

CARRIE

My fucking Grandma died I'm more put together than all 3 of you combined! Fucking ridiculous. I hope that ALL of your insurance claims get fucking denied.

MO

How many swear words are you gonna shove into one sentence goldilocks?

CARRIE

As fucking many as I fucking want dickwad! Fucker! Bitch! Motherfucking bitch slut senile whore fucker-

MO hits CARRIE in the neck. CARRIE passes out and hits the floor. everyone is put into a state of shock.

DAVID

"Catastrophizing: Seeing only the worst possible outcomes of a situation."

DAVID smiles as if he's done something huge.

PATTISON

I don't get paid enough for this..

CLEO

You don't get paid at all apparently.

MO

Just get a nurse to come get her.

PATTISON

It's a lot more complicated than that, you just a-

MO

Oh boohoo Pattison, who's been on your side this entire session? Me, you wouldn't wanna make an enemy out of me, would you? I mean look at what happened to the last person.

CLEO  
Hit the emergency button  
Pattison!!

PATTISON  
I can't...

CLEO  
WHY?!

PATTISON  
Budget cuts...

MO AND CLEO  
Oh you poor soul.

PATTISON  
Do we just continue?

MO  
Yeah, she won't die, she's just  
joining David on the sleep train.

DAVID  
Meditation

DAVID puts his head back down to "meditate"

PATTISON  
Ok then, well David read our next  
point, catastrophizing, which was  
very sweet of him. Does anyone  
wanna speak on that?

MO death glares towards CLEO, giving her the urge to speak

CLEO  
Well I mean! When Jo didn't show  
up I guess I was  
catastrophizing...

PATTISON  
Yes! Very good self recognition  
Cleo, that tends to be something a  
lot of people have trouble  
noticing, let alone admitting. You  
know I-

CARRIE lets out a gravelly gasp, making everyone except David who is sleeping soundly scream.

CARRIE  
GOD FUCKING DAMN IT.

She takes a second to catch her breath, gets back up and sits in her chair as if nothing happened.

CARRIE  
I'm so sorry that happened!! I didn't mean to fall asleep mid lecture- I mean session...

PATTISON  
You are so ok, I mean, are you ok?

CARRIE starts tearing up and just shakes her head aggressively.

PATTISON  
Ok, well we're all here for you

CARRIE  
Thank you.

PATTISON  
Go ahead Cleo.

CLEO  
Oh, I had finished talking and you were responding.

PATTISON  
Oh, silly me I must be all over the place. Who wants to read the next one?

CARRIE  
I can!

PATTISON  
Actually, Carrie, I think it's best if we give you a moment to recollect your thoughts.

CARRIE  
LET. ME. DO IT.

PATTISON

Ok! Ok.

CARRIE

``Should' statements: The belief that things should be a certain way. 'I should always be perfect.'"

PATTISON

This one's tricky, because it's in our daily vocabulary. "Should" is often-

CLEO

Does that also apply to shouldn't?

PATTISON

Uh, Cleo, you cut me off.

CLEO

Doesn't feel so great does it? Maybe you shouldn't have cut me off and I'd feel bad about it.

PATTISON

Yes, it does apply to shouldn't

CLEO

You're just saying that to win

PATTISON

What?

CLEO

Shouldn't is the opposite of should

MO

Girl what?

PATTISON

Just because it's the "opposite" doesn't mean it has the opposite effect.

CLEO

Shouldn't is the shortened version of should not, so it's the opposite right? Also you're saying we shouldn't say should, so if it's the same that's pretty counterintuitive

MO

You should shut up.

Beat

CLEO  
You're seriously gonna let that  
slide, Pattison?

PATTISON  
It's a recommendation, not a  
command.

CLEO  
This is bullshit. You're absolute  
bullshit Pattison.

PATTISON  
"Jumping to conclusions:  
Interpreting the meaning of a  
Situation with little or no  
evidence."

CLEO  
Did you just ignore me?

PATTISON  
Carrie, how does that affect you  
on a day to day basis?

CARRIE  
Oh! Well, I'm not quite sure. I  
don't find myself too observant on  
that end.

CLEO  
Hello???

PATTISON  
I see, that reminded me of an  
exercise in mindfulness, to help  
us be more self aware of course.  
We're gonna sit in silence and  
choose one sense to focus on for  
one minute. I'll set a timer right  
now, are we ready?

CARRIE  
Sure!

MO  
Why not?

DAVID  
Hmmm?

CLEO  
Wait! What abo-

PATTISON  
Begin.

Everyone's eyes are closed. It stays quiet for around 15 seconds until someone begins clicking a pen. Shortly afterward loud jacket shuffling follows, foot tapping, knocking, and humming. It becomes a cacophony of fidgeting noises.

DAVID  
Can you guys shut up? This is worse than when you're talking-

PATTISON  
Shh...

The "silence" continues a little longer.

PATTISON  
Ok, how did that make everyone feel?

DAVID  
Annoyed.

MO  
Inpatient.

CARRIE  
Funny.

CLEO  
Awful.

CLEO looks miserable. Everyone tries to silently tell PATTISON to apologize.

PATTISON  
Look, Cleo. I-

CLEO  
You what Pattison?

A stare off between the two happen until MO fakes a cough

PATTISON  
At the end of the day, I'm here for my patients. So I'm... I... I'm sorry.

CLEO  
What was that? I couldn't hear you.

PATTISON

(mumbles) I apologize.

CLEO  
You know that was so intelligible that I don't actually think—

PATTISON  
I'M SORRY! I'm sorry I cut you off just now, and a while ago, and a bit ago before that. I hope you can forgive me and we can continue making this a safe space.

CLEO  
I accept your apology.

PATTISON  
Thank you. Would you like to read out our next cognitive distortion?

CLEO  
Absolutely.

CLEO  
"Personalization: The belief that you are responsible for events outside of your control. 'My mom is always upset. She would be fine if I did more to help her.'"

PATTISON  
So who feels like this is relatable? I certainly do.

MO  
Why don't you tell us why?

PATTISON  
Excuse me?

MO  
I think I'd be more comfortable sharing if you did, I mean after all, you usually sit quietly during these discussions when Jo's here.

CLEO  
I agree!

PATTISON  
I don't think that's quite appropriate—

CLEO  
I'll stop bitching about Jo being  
gone if you do.

MO gives CLEO a fistbump, therefore forming an alliance for  
the rest of the session.

PATTISON  
Oh, well in that case I-

DAVID  
Sometimes I feel like everything  
is my fault, and I just sleep it  
away. When my mother turns her  
head to look at me I can't help  
close my eyes. If I had been a  
better son, would my dad still be  
here? If I could secure a job,  
maybe the medical bills wouldn't  
be too expensive to pay for.  
"You're only 15" they say, I'm not  
responsible for when I was born,  
but I am responsible for what I do  
now, and right now what I want to  
do is-

PATTISON  
Wait. Sorry to interrupt David,  
but you're 15?

DAVID  
Yeah, why are you so shocked?

PATTISON  
This group is for adults only... How  
did you get in here???

DAVID  
No, it's not. This is room 6,  
which is an adolescent support  
group, are you crazy, Patrick?

PATTISON  
We're in room 9... And my name's  
Pattison, not Patrick. How did  
nobody catch this?

Everyone takes a second to think to themselves, some may be  
shrugging and others bewildered.

CLEO

Welllllll, I mean, he is rather tall for a 15 year old.

MO

If he walked into the bar I worked at I wouldn't ID him most likely.

CARRIE

He meditates a lot with his head down so that probably contributed.

PATTISON

Wow, ok. So... Would you like to go to the *actual* room 6, David?

DAVID

Nah, thanks tho.

PATTISON

Uh- let me rephrase, can you please go to the actual room 6 and we'll figure out the arrangements afterwards?

DAVID

It's not my fault I'm in the wrong room.

PATTISON

Actually, it is-

DAVID

No, actually, it isn't. 'Cause you see, why is my name on the role call then?

CLEO

Jo had added it the beginning of the sessions because she thought it was a system error...

DAVID

See, so it's a systematic issue.

MO

Huh?

PATTISON

Ok, well we can figure this out later.

DAVID

Procrastination: The constant need to push something that could be solved now to later. "Let's figure this out later", "Can we do it another time?" Etc.

PATTISON

I don't think that's on the handout-

DAVID

Pulled it out of my ass to make a point.

MO

Impressive.

DAVID

Thanks. Anyways what I'm saying is if we're going to procrastinate this issue, might as well let me stay for the remainder of the session.

CARRIE, CLEO & MO agree among each other.

PATTISON

Ok, you can stay till the rest of this session.

DAVID

Thank you.

CARRIE

Pattison, can I suggest something?

PATTISON

Of course, what is it, Carrie?

CARRIE

If it's alright, can we talk more about our lives and less about the analytical side? I prefer to leave that to my psychiatrist

Everyone agrees.

PATTISON

Absolutely, is there anything in particular you'd like to share with the group?

CARRIE nods furiously

PATTISON

Can you articulate it?

CARRIE

Well, I- you see- It's just kinda,  
wellllllllllllllllllllllllllllllll

MO

Take your time, why don't you.

CARRIE

*(whispers)* I stole something from the grocery store.

PATTISON

I'm sorry, I don't think I heard you. Could you please repeat-

CARRIE

I STOLE SOMETHING FROM THE GROCERY STORE!!!! I didn't mean to- I DON'T KNOW HOW IT HAPPENED!! I've been figuring out how to turn myself in... It was a carton of milk. A really big carton, about yea high, this wide, AND I STOLE IT!! I was checking out with a real human being, not a robot, and she asks; how's your day? and I say "my day is great, the sun's out and I'm finally getting the groceries I so desperately needed!" and I laugh so she laughs and the machine asks me if I wanna donate and so I donate and she rings a 'congrats!!! You're not an asshole!!!' bell and then the lady behind me taps my shoulder and she says "donating here is a scam you know" and I say "what do you mean?" And she says that I'm writing off all the companies taxes and I didn't donate, I just have a martyr complex. So I'm already scrambled and the lady is still making a big deal about me donating with that fucking bell and the hippie behind me is shaking her head disapprovingly, so as I continued to unload my cart because I didn't finish unloading and everything's all out of order I forget the milk I have at the bottom of my grocery cart, you know that secret layer you never use until you have way to much shit and then you tell yourself you won't forget it? Well, I forgot it. So I'm carting my groceries away and I thought I heard a "miss" but I didn't turn around because I thought I was crazy but I didn't wanna look crazy. I pop open my trunk to my MINI cooper and I'm unloading it all, only to find when I push my cart back THE MILK I STOLE!!! So I go numb and freak out and drive away like a felon, because I freaked out! That's what all those hit and run drivers say and I'm starting to wonder if they mean it? Did all of them mean it? Or meant it at some point until they realized they knew the errors of their ways and didn't give a fuck at all about it? There's only so much I can do really- I didn't know but I forgot and knew at one point so am I liable? Everytime I drive in Belle, my MINI cooper, I feel so guilty, and I never went back and paid for the milk, so do I really feel guilty? Maybe this is it for me. Maybe I'll get a criminal record and barely convince some rink-a-dink shop to hire me!! If only I had turned around and admitted it then. But I didn't, hell, I haven't even said it out loud

until this very moment! You're not gonna turn me in, right? Can I at least get a chance for having good character if I go to court? I beg of you. Pattison. I'm in a very tight spot right now and I don't know what I'm supposed to do...

PATTISON

Ok, breathe. How much did the milk cost?

CARRIE

Five dollars and some cents.

MO

How much did you donate?

CARRIE

Five dollars.

MO

Then could you reframe it as paying for their donation taxes rather than you stealing five dollars worth of product from them?

CARRIE

I mean, I could.

PATTISON

Good idea, Mo. Let's go with that.

CARRIE

But will the cops know that?

MO

Trust me, the cops got bigger issues to deal with, I would know.

CARRIE

Are you married to a cop?

DAVID

FUCK THE POPO!

CLEO

That was random but what he said.

CARRIE

Guys, wait. She might be married to one!

MO

No, trust me, I'm not. I am the bigger issue.

PATTISON

How do you mean?

MO

I'd tell you but then I'd have to kill you.

PATTISON

Ok, well Carrie do you at least feel a little better after telling us and troubleshooting with us?

CARRIE

Yes, I really do!

PATTISON

Ok, is there anything else anyone wants to say?

Beat.

PATTISON

Ok, if there's nothing else, we can end a little early?

MO

A little? Aren't we like 40 minutes early? these things usually last an hour.

PATTISON

Wow, it felt like three.

CLEO

Usually the facilitators don't say that kind of thing.

PATTISON

Well, it's my last day anyways.

EVERYONE BUT PATTISON

WHAT?!

CLEO

When was this decided?

PATTISON

15 minutes ago. I'm not a good fit for therapy, it's too stressful for me to manage. I don't know how Jo is gonna do it with a child when I can't even do it barren.

MO

Thanks for telling us we suck. What are you gonna do instead?

PATTISON

I'm gonna do something that requires no counseling, has a very stable work environment and gives me enough fulfillment as it does time

off.

CARRIE  
Ooh! Which is?

PATTISON  
Teaching middle school!

MO  
You must not need much fulfillment then...

CLEO  
Pattison...

PATTISON  
What?

MO  
Who's gonna tell him?

PATTISON  
Tell me what?

CARRIE  
Did you ever go to middle school?

PATTISON  
Yes, why do you ask?

MO  
You'll figure it out soon enough. I have a feeling it might end similarly, not a wish, just a hunch.

PATTISON  
Ok, well anyways, therapy is concluded for the day. Everyone have a good weekend.

Everyone except PATTISON says thank you and leaves one by one. CLEO hesitates before she leaves and stays behind for a moment.

CLEO  
Hey, Pattison?

PATTISON  
Yes, Cleo?

CLEO  
I know I was talking about Jo a lot, but I'll miss you too. You were pretty alright for today's therapy.

CLEO exits.

THE END