

PSYCHOLOGICAL BLINDERS

All of us, from time-to-time, fail to think reasonably; these moments are often driven by our emotions. We cling to reactive ways of functioning, and the more pressure we are under, the more likely we are to rely on this category of responses, which fall under the general heading of “oversimplification.”

The world is a complex and challenging place, and, often, we respond to moments that challenge our long-held values or beliefs with resistance. People who study the way our minds work have noted that there are certain patterns of thinking we gravitate towards in those intense moments. Below, you will find brief descriptions of the most common reactive responses; experts refer to these as “psychological blinders.”

1. **Mindset**—a tendency of the human mind to view a situation in a certain way despite contrary evidence. In other words, “don’t bother me with the evidence; I have an opinion I wish to maintain.”
 - Mindsets are dangerous because they encourage us to believe what we want to believe rather than what is so, as the evidence proves. Often, people caught in a mindset will argue that they are being realistic when they are not.
2. **Thought Habits**--are a first cousin of mindsets—this is when we tend to persist in a particular method of attack on a problem despite evidence that such a “solution” is not working. When Dr. Phil says, “how’s that working out for you?” He is challenging a person’s thought habits. While mindsets describe what we think, thought habits describe what we do in response to what we think. When someone fails to interpret failure as a signal that a “solution” isn’t working and persists in repeating the behavior, that individual is caught up in a thought habit.
 - Thought Habits are dangerous because they keep us from overcoming problems that interfere with our lives or the lives of others. Creative thinking is how we break thought habits.
3. **Attitudes**—an attitude is a description of a reaction demonstrated when a person is in a persistent state of readiness to react favorably or unfavorably towards a stimulus (such as the government, police officers, lima beans, and so on) no matter what the particular circumstances—it’s when we function from assumptions about people and things instead of thinking about the particulars of the person or thing before us. People

with an “attitude” are extremely difficult to reason with because they usually have both a mindset and thought habit at work.

- **Stereotypes** are a particularly pernicious form of an attitude. People who stereotype have a fixed idea about any individual they perceive to be part of a group (whether that grouping is built on race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, profession and so on). They oversimplify the complex nature of human beings and fail to evaluate the character of individuals on an individual basis.
4. **Repression**—when an idea is threatening, causing us to respond emotionally, we often simply repress the idea and emotion. That is, we refuse to let it enter our consciousness, so that we don’t have to face the idea and feeling and consider it reasonably. It is very difficult to identify when we are repressing ideas and emotions. In this case, we must listen to those close to us who indicate that we are “pushing things away” or “ignoring the problem.”
 5. **Projection**—sometimes, we possess a trait that we are not comfortable with or proud of, and we don’t want to face the fact that we possess such a characteristic. We aren’t the ones with a “temper,” someone else is. When we repress the recognition of a characteristic and project that on to someone else, we are in frame of mind called “projection.” It is generally driven by a need for self-protection—to preserve an image of ourselves that is essential to our identity. It tends to breed intolerance of others. We must recognize our own faults in the process of solving problems. People respect those who are willing to risk admitting a flaw.