Common Thought Distortions

Artificial/Manufactured Vs. Natural Emotions: A "natural emotion" resulting from being abused may be anger at your perpetrator or sadness at having experienced this event. An "artificial/manufactured emotion" resulting from being abused might be guilt that you should have done something to stop it or sadness that you are now damaged forever. For the person with the emotion, because they are so close to it, it is hard to distinguish natural vs artificial emotions (oftentimes it helps for an outside person to point it out).

>   *Ex: Because I didn't protect my sister from my dad beating her I feel guilty at a 10.*

All-or-Nothing Thinking: You view a situation in only two categories instead of on a continuum or gradation (aka "black and white thinking" or "polarized/dichotomous thinking").

>   *Ex: If you ain't first you're last.*

Catastrophizing: You predict the future negatively without considering positive (usually more likely) outcomes (aka "fortune telling").

>   *Ex: Court's going to be so bad I will just curl up into a ball.*

Discounting Positive: NO positive experience counts. Period.

>   *Ex: Sure, **that** worked out okay, but that doesn't mean anything. It was just luck.*

Emotional Reasoning: You think something must be true because you *feel* (believe) it so strongly that you ignore or discount evidence to the contrary.

>   *Ex: I know things will probably be okay, but I still feel like a failure.*

Labeling: You put a fixed global label on yourself or others without considering that evidence might more reasonably lead to a less disastrous conclusion.

>   *Ex: "I'm a sex offender, I'll always be this way."*

Magnification/Minimization: When you evaluate yourself, another person, or a situation, you unreasonably magnify the negative and/or minimize the positive.

>   *Ex (magnification): What my dad said is right, I am worthless.*

>   *Ex (minimization): He has to be a good dad right, he already has two kids and he's only 17.*

Mental Filter: You pay attention to ONE negative detail instead of seeing the whole picture (can only see the leaf not the forest).

Ex: Because I got an F (even though all other classes are B's or A's), it means I'm stupid.

Overgeneralization: You make a sweeping negative conclusion that goes FAR beyond the current situation.

Ex: Because I've been abused, it means I'm damaged forever and no one will want me.

Personalization: A "Reverse Fundamental Attribution Bias." You believe others are behaving negatively because of you, without considering more plausible (and likely) explanations of their behavior.

Ex: That kid bumped me in the hall because he wanted to start something.

"Should" and "Must" Statements: (ALWAYS red flag sentences/thoughts that start with these words) You have a precise, fixed idea of how you or others should behave and you overestimate how bad it is that these expectations are not met.

Ex: I don't care if my dad was 6 feet tall and 250 (and I was only 8 years old), I should have fought him harder.

Ex: Since my uncle sexually abused me it must mean I deserved it. He wouldn't have done it unless I deserved it.

Tunnel vision: You ONLY see negative aspects of situations (can only see the tree, not the forest).

Ex: My daughter's school is worthless. They're critical and insensitive and don't teach her anything.