Common Unhelpful Thoughts

Thoughts become unhelpful when they increase your feelings of anger. Everyone has unhelpful thoughts sometimes and they can be hard to identify, especially when you are angry. Here are some common types of unhelpful thoughts:

All-or-nothing thinking:
All-or-nothing thinking is when people see things only in extremes--people or events are one thing or another (e.g., all good or all bad; right or wrong).
Example: "I made a mistake at work today--I am a total failure."
Alternative: "I made a mistake at work today, but that is rare and I do most things well."

Catastrophizing:
Catastrophizing is when people exaggerate the importance or impact of things, making them worse than they might be.
Example: "I yelled at the grocery store clerk, and now I can never go back to that store."
Alternative: "I yelled at the grocery store clerk. I bet things would be okay if apologized to her next time I see her."

Overgeneralizing:
Overgeneralizing is when a negative event is seen as one, in a never-ending pattern, or series, of similar negative events.
Example: "I failed the exam, which just shows I'll never be able to get through college."
Alternative: "I failed the exam, but next time I can start studying earlier and will do better."

Fortune-telling:
Fortune-telling (I know what will happen …) is when a person predicts that things will turn out badly and is convinced of this, before the event happens.
Example: "I can't go to the family reunion, because I will be uncomfortable and have a miserable time."
Alternative: "I'll go the family reunion and see how things go. I can leave whenever I want to, if it isn't fun."

Mind-reading:
Mind-reading (I know they are thinking…) is when a person assumes that other people are thinking negatively of them, when there is no actual evidence for this.
Example: "The other parents think I am a bad parent, because I wasn't able to get off work to go to my child's concert."
Alternative: "I don't know what the other parents are thinking about why I wasn't at the concert, and it doesn't matter."

Externalization/Blaming:
Externalization/blaming is when a person blames others for being the main cause of negative events, without considering how they themselves may have contributed to what happened.
Example: "If people would drive faster, I wouldn't be late and get mad all the time."
Alternative: "If I leave 10 minutes earlier, I'll get there on time and my anger won't get triggered."

Personalization:
Personalization is when people see themselves as the cause of a negative event for which, in fact, they were not responsible.
Example: "A friend's car got broken into while parked in my neighborhood. It was my fault. If they hadn't come to my party, their car wouldn't have been broken into."
Alternative: "I'm upset that my friend's car was broken into while in my neighborhood, but I wasn't the person that did it and couldn't have known it would happen."