

Magnetic Ideals



Catching ANTs (Automatic Negative Thoughts)

Automatic Negative Thoughts are your first thought when you have a strong feeling or reaction to something, they are a reflex rather than free thinking, they are not necessarily true and repeating them can drag you down. They can be persistent and learned, often repeating themes such as danger or fear. There are common ANTs that people experience on a regular basis:

Black and white thinking, with no grey areas: “I’ve completely failed.” “Everyone else can do it”

Catastrophising: “Nothing is ever going to work for me.” “I’m going to mess this up.”

Self-blame: “They look cross. It must be my fault.”

Name calling, to self and others: “Idiot.” “Stupid” “I’m so dumb.”

Unrealistic expectations: “I should keep going, even when I’m tired.”

Dramatising: “I got that wrong. I’m the worst person ever.”

Over-generalisation: “This relationship ended, so I won’t ever meet anybody.”

Disqualifying the positive: “I may be a good student, but anybody can do that.”

Crystal-ball gazing: “There’s no point in trying. It won’t work.”

Mind reading other people: “They think I’m boring.” “People must think I’m stupid.” “Nobody likes me.”

Once we are aware of ANTs (Automatic Negative Thoughts) we can change them by challenging or questioning them, and learn to control them and in turn, be more in control and be more positive about ourselves and our abilities. Sometimes just name the thought as an ANT can stop it in its tracks. During the day you can keep a note of them, it can help to write them down and then throw them away at the end of the day!

If you are having regular ANTs that keep recurring, practice the following simple steps:

1. Be aware of what you are saying to yourself. Ask yourself –

- “What is going through my mind?” or
- “What is it about this situation that is upsetting me?”

2. Challenge your thoughts. Remember, just because you think something doesn’t mean it’s true. Ask yourself –

- Is this thought helpful?
- Am I being realistic?
- Is this an example of one of the common ANTs?

3. Consider the following strategies & ask yourself some of these questions:

Look for evidence:

- What’s the evidence for and against my thought?
- Am I focusing on the negatives and ignoring other information?
- Am I jumping to conclusions without looking at all the facts?

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- Search for alternative explanations:
- Are there any other possible explanations?
- Is there another way of looking at this?
- How would someone else think if they were in this situation?
- Am I being too inflexible in my thinking?

Put thoughts into perspective:

- Is it as bad as I am making out? What is the worst that could happen?
- How likely is it that the worst will happen? Even if it did happen, would it really be that bad? What could I do to get through it?

4. What is a more helpful thought?

- What can I say to myself that will help me remain calmer and help me achieve what I want to achieve in this situation?

Now you are aware of your own ANTs watch out for other people' ANTs. If you are working in a group and you see other people saying things you feel are ANTs or posting them online let them know these unhelpful thoughts can be overcome. You can share this worksheet with them and we can work together to challenge the Automatic Negative Thoughts we have learned to have about ourselves.

Adapted from The Happiness Institute Website