Spot it
Challenge it
Change it

Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTs)

and unhelpful thinking styles



Our minds can be clever... but sometimes they can be a bit too negative!
Here are some common unhelpful thinking patterns – and how to challenge them.

All or nothing thinking

Also known as 'black or white thinking' – things are either right or wrong, good or bad. Can lead you to give up at the first small sign of failure or think too rigidly.

Examples:

- I failed this test. I am stupid so I am giving up.
- Either we do it like this or not at all.

Don't feed the ANT!

Things aren't always either black or white. Try to think of a middle ground. One mistake doesn't mean total failure. Start afresh tomorrow. Compromise can be positive.

Mental filter

Seeing the world through a 'filter' which only lets you see the negative. Feels like you are seeing through dark glasses and can only see the dark side of things without recognising the positive.

Examples:

- I only came second in the exam. I should have come first.
- I have got more responsibilities so this will mean more work and longer hours.

Don't feed the ANT!

Actively giving a positive spin to events will help boost your mood. Ask yourself what's a more balanced and upbeat way of thinking?

Jumping to conclusions

Presuming we know what other people are thinking without looking at the evidence.

Examples:

- Sarah didn't say hello. She must be mad with me.

Don't feed the ANT!

Don't jump to conclusions. You can't read someone else's mind and don't know what they are thinking. There may be another explanation. What's the evidence? What's a more helpful way of thinking?

Mind reading

Presuming we know what other people are thinking without looking at the evidence.

Examples:

- Sarah didn't say hello. She must be mad with me.

Don't feed the ANT!

Don't jump to conclusions. You can't read someone else's mind and don't know what they are thinking. There may be another explanation. What's the evidence? What's a more helpful way of thinking?

Fortune telling

Predicting the future and having negative expectations about what will happen.

Examples:

- What's the point? I know I am going to do badly in this interview. I'll never get a job.
- I am never going to lose weight so I may as well eat this cream cake.

Don't feed the ANT!

Keep an open mind about the future. Having negative expectations based on previous experience can rule out the real possibility of change. Is that really bound to happen?

Labelling

Giving labels to ourselves or other people.

Examples:

- I'm a loser. I am useless.
- They are all idiots.

Don't feed the ANT!

Swap unhelpful and negative labels for positive re-enforcement: My kids think I am a great mum, I am really good at my job and always put in 100% effort.

Over-generalising

Using the words 'always', 'never', 'nothing', 'every time' or 'everyone' to make unfounded over-generalisations. If something bad happens once, you expect it to happen again and again.

Examples:

- I am always bad at that.
- Nothing good ever happens.

Don't feed the ANT!

Never say 'never'. Ban using unhelpful words like 'always', 'never', 'nothing', 'every time' or 'everyone.' Just because it may have happened once does not mean it will happen again.

Emotional thinking

Thinking that the way we feel about something must make it true.

Examples:

- I feel like a failure so I must be one.
- I feel so anxious, something bad is going to happen.

Don't feed the ANT!

Feelings are real, but they aren't always facts. Just because you feel something doesn't mean it's true. Take a step back and check the evidence.

A kinder, calmer mind is possible!

- Notice the thought
- Challenge the thought
- Choose a more balanced, helpful perspective
- Feel better, one thought at a time

HEALTHIER THOUGHTS • BRIGHTER OUTLOOKS • YOU GOT THIS