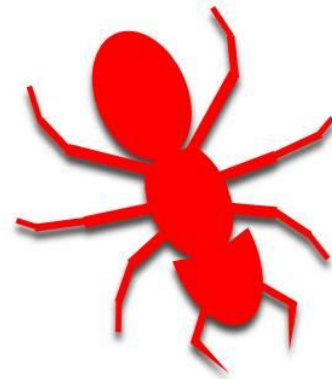
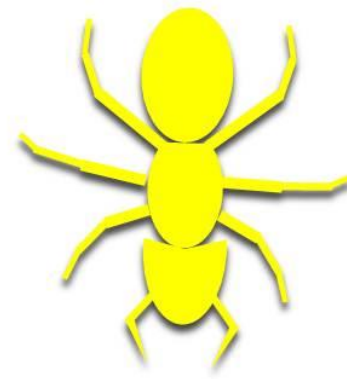


# A.N.T.S. – Automatic Negative Thoughts

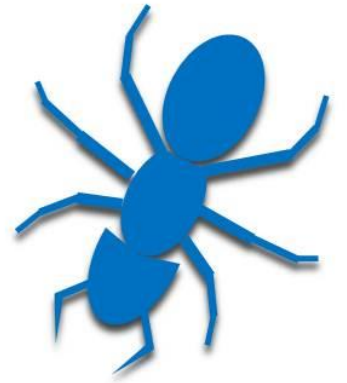
## **A**UTOMATIC **N**EGATIVE **T**HOUGHTS



*I hate \_\_\_\_\_!*



*What if I fail?*



*I'm not \_\_\_\_\_ enough.*

Dotun Ogunyemi

# Objectives

- Be aware of different types of automatic negative thoughts
- Become aware of your own automatic negative thoughts
- Be able to lists methods to stop automatic negative thoughts

# ANTS Can be a Pest!

## A.N.T.S. – Automatic Negative Thoughts

- ***Automatic:***
- They just seem to “pop” into your head without being invited
- ***Negative :***
- “Put yourself down”, “worst case scenario”
- ***Thoughts:***
- “The talking voice in your head” based on experience

# ANTS

- 1. Always negative
- 2. Makes you feel bad about yourself
- 3. Self-sabotaging and tend to stop you from helping yourself
- 4. Uninvited and judging you when you least expect it
- 5. Believable because you are stuck in a negative thinking trap
- 6. Biased because you are experiencing a distorted perception of reality

Negative views about  
the world



**THE  
COGNITIVE  
TRIAD**



Negative views about  
one's self



Negative views about  
the future

mindmypeelings

The automatic negative thoughts are categorized into three perspectives of one's belief. This was first proposed by Aaron Beck in 1976 and is known as the Negative Triad.

The triad involves automatic, uncontrollable negative thoughts about:

1. One's **Self**: "I'm worthless and hate myself"
2. The **World** or **Environment**: "Why does no one care about me"
3. The **Future**: "Things will never get better"

# Why Do I Have Negative Thoughts?

- It is completely *normal* to experience both positive and negative thoughts daily. So, you can stop worrying, it's okay to have negative thoughts.
- Negative thoughts are an *evolutionary* trait to help keep you safe.
- It is meant to *identify* threats, *learn* from mistakes, and *solve* problems.
- 90% of all thoughts are repetitive.
- If you repeat something often enough, it creates a *neural pathway* in the brain.
- If your negative thoughts get repeated enough, they become *habitual*.



# Effects of Negative Thinking

- Negative thinking is normal and is there to keep you safe. However, when you have a negative experience, your brain will remember it.
- The next time you have a similar experience, your brain triggers a response thinking it is being threatened.
- This negative response is what makes you feel agitated, angry, depressed, or anxious.
- It can trigger a downward spiral which leads to a **cycle** of negative thoughts, emotions, and unhelpful behaviors.
- Learn how to challenge automatic negative thoughts.

Depleting beneficial brain chemicals like the feel-good neurotransmitters serotonin and dopamine

- Slowing the production of brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), a protein required for new brain cell formation
- Shrinking the size of your brain but enlarging your brain's fear center, the amygdala
- Increasing your risk of psychiatric and neurodegenerative diseases
- Accelerating the brain's aging process

What are Your...  
**AUTOMATIC  
NEGATIVE  
THOUGHTS**



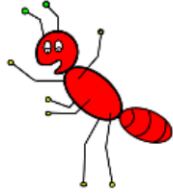
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# Polarized Thinking: All-or-nothing thinking; Black and White Thinking

Does this “ANT” bug you?



## ANT #1: Black and White Thinking

Using words like “always,” “never,” and “every” is the hallmark of this ANT. Catch yourself the next time you say to yourself “I’m *never* going to lose weight,” “You’re *always* late,” or “*Everyone* understands this but me.”

**Distortion:** You see things in categories. If your performance falls short of perfect, you see it as a failure. When you have an “All or Nothing” thinking pattern. There is a desire to be *perfect*, otherwise a complete failure.

**Challenge:** Avoid thinking in extremes (black or white). You don’t need to choose either/or extremes that are presented to you. Identify how you can be less extreme or how to be more *flexible*. Try to think in shades of gray, identify middle ground.

**Example Thought:** I received an A- on an exam when I am typically used to receiving A+ grades only, I feel like a failure.

**Reframed Thought:** I didn’t do as well on the exam as I had hoped. But an A- is still a really good grade and I am grateful for it.

# Mental Filtering

## Disqualifying the Positive: Focusing on the negative



### ANT #2: Focusing on the Negative

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This ANT involves dismissing the good and focusing on the negative.

As someone once said, *"We can complain because rose bushes have thorns, or rejoice because thorns have roses."* The source of this quote is in doubt, but the wisdom contained within is not

- **Distortion:** You reject positive experiences by insisting they *"don't count"* for some reason or other. You maintain a negative belief that is contradicted by your everyday experiences. Acknowledges the positive experiences but refuses to accept it. Invalidates and ignores the positives while finding excuses to turn it into a negative one.
- **Challenge:** Value the positive aspects as much as you value the negative aspects. Take pride in your accomplishments. Embrace any compliments or positive feedback you received no matter how small it may seem; cultivate an attitude of gratitude.
- **Example Thought:** I received a good mark on my assignment, but it's probably a mistake. I'm pretty sure it was just luck or fluke; I don't normally get good grades.
- **Reframed Thought:** I received a good mark on my assignment. I am grateful to receive this grade and am proud of what I accomplished.

# Jumping to Conclusions:

## *Fortune Telling*



### ANT #3: Fortune Telling

We're not talking about psychics who try to tell your future with a crystal ball.

(Although they may be more accurate than those prone to this common ANT.)

We're talking about those fortune-telling folks who "know" that the worst possible outcome in any situation *will* occur. If your knee-jerk reaction to any new idea is "that's not going to work," you may suffer from this common cognitive distortion.



- **Distortion:** Making conclusions and predictions based on little or no evidence. Predictions are generally arbitrary and have negative outcomes. You anticipate that things will turn out badly and feel convinced.
- **Challenge:** Ask yourself how do you know what will actually happen. Is there any evidence to suggest that what you think will occur will actually happen? Think about how often you have been accurate with your predictions in the past.
- **Example Thought:** I'm going to have a bad day today.
- **Reframed Thought:** Today may have some challenges, but I will overcome them and have a good day.

# Jumping to Conclusions: Mind Reading



## ANT #4: Mind Reading

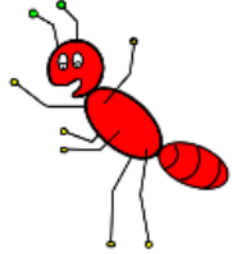
Another activity best left to the psychics is mind reading.

With this ANT, you think you *know* what another person is thinking. You wrongly assume their thoughts are about you, of course, and that they aren't good.

- **Distortion:** Knowing what the other person is thinking. *Assumptions* of reasons or intentions are taken as the only valid reasoning.
- **Challenge:** Ask yourself if you are sure, you actually know what someone is thinking. Investigate your assumptions and try to identify logical reasons, based on evidence, that may have contributed to the situation that has occurred.
- **Example Thought:** I visit a friend, but her expression seems negative towards me. She doesn't want to see me and goes into her bedroom. She claimed she was sick, but I feel like she is avoiding me.
- **Reframed Thought:** She could really be sick and just wants to rest. There are many reasons why she wouldn't want to see me, such as being self-conscious about her appearance or even worried she might be contagious.



# Emotional reasoning



## ANT #5: Thinking With Your Feelings

This occurs when you have negative feelings without questioning them.

You may be in a situation where you *feel* stupid, for example. It's easy for that feeling to morph into the thought that you *are* stupid, though this is not true.



- **Distortion:** Any feeling must be true. The emotion is accepted as fact because all logical reasoning is blocked out. You assume that your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are “I feel it, therefore it must be true.”
- **Challenge:** Let yourself feel your emotions but don't let it consume you. Be *mindful* of your emotions without judgment. Remember emotions can change quickly. Avoid letting your emotion transform into truths. Challenge the validity of what you are feeling and identify whether it is based on emotions or facts.
- **Example Thought:** I feel alone and uncared for because my partner does not want to spend time with me and instead is working overtime.
- **Reframed Thought:** My partner is working overtime because they are busy at work. Not because they do not care for me. Usually, when they are not busy, they will spend time with me



# Should statement:



## ANT #6: Being Ruled by “Shoulds”

You try to motivate yourself with should or shouldn'ts, as if you had to be whipped and punished before you could be expected to do anything. “Must” and ‘oughts” to be also offenders. The emotional consequence is guilt. When you direct “should” statements towards others, you feel anger, frustration, and resentment.

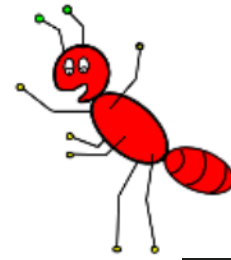
Dr. Amen calls using words like *should* or *have to* “guilt beatings.”

Ouch. Guilt (or others) into changing is rarely productive.



- **Distortion:** “Should” do, “must” do, or even “shouldn’t” do statements. The statements are rules enforced on yourself or others.
- **Challenge:** Identify how the “should” statements make you feel. These statements should be motivating rather than making you feel conflicted or even paralyzed. Try to use the word prefer in place of should.
- **Example Thought:** I should stop being lazy and exercise today.
- **Reframed Thought:** I would prefer to exercise today. But I’m not feeling up for it today. If I don’t exercise today, I can exercise the next day.

# Labeling and mislabeling



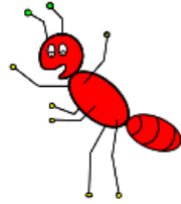
This is an extreme form of overgeneralization. Instead of describing your error, you attach a negative label to yourself: “I’m a loser.” When someone else’s behavior rubs you the wrong way, you attach a negative label to him: “He’s a jerk.” Mislabeling involves describing an event with language that is highly colored and emotionally loaded.



- **Distortion:** Assign judgment to yourself or others solely based on one negative incident. The label is generally exaggerated.
- **Challenge:** Remember labels are a result of an error or mistake. Attribute the error to the event instead of yourself or others. One failed attempt does not define you, separate these from the negative labels. Remind yourself that nobody is just one thing.
- **Example Thought:** Someone at work made a mistake that had severe consequences for other tasks including the ones I am working on. Why are they so stupid for making those mistakes, now I have to redo everything.
- **Reframed Thought:** I understand that mistakes can happen to any of us. Unfortunately, this mistake occurred. We will have to spend some extra effort to fix it, but it is not the end of the world. They made a mistake and I know they are capable of doing a better job next time.

# Personalization

You see yourself as the cause of some negative external event for which, in fact, you were not primary responsible



## ANT #8: Taking Things Personally

When others don't treat you as well as you'd like, don't take it personally.

This might be hard to hear if you are prone to this ANT, but the world doesn't revolve around you.

People are not thinking about you as much as you imagine! If a co-worker is grumpy, it's probably because he had a bad night, is overwhelmed with work, or is worrying about something that has nothing to do with you.



- **Distortion:** Takes things personally which causes a direct and personal reaction to everything others do or say even if unrelated to them.
- **Challenge:** Identify why you feel responsible and determine if it was really in your control. Acknowledge that things are rarely one person's fault. **Brainstorm logical** reasons rather than unnecessarily blaming yourself if you feel excluded or targeted. Look at things from an outsider's perspective.
- **Example Thought:** My partner and I show up late to a dinner party at a friend's. When we arrived, it seemed like everyone was mad and not having a good time because we showed up late. I should have made us leave earlier so this wouldn't have happened.
- **Reframed Thought:** Even though we were late to the dinner party, I cannot control how people feel if they aren't having a good time. There could be other factors that contributed to people not enjoying the party before I arrived.

# Blaming

## ANT #9: Blame

This last one is rather straightforward.

Don't blame others for your own problems. Realize that you are responsible for your own actions, thoughts, and attitudes.



- **Distortion:** Blames others and plays a *victim* role while holding others responsible for their pain.
- **Challenge:** Avoid playing a victim role by trying to see the situation from the other *person's perspective*. Recognize that blame does not always fall on one person's shoulders. **Take responsibility** and apologize for any role you may have played in the situation. **Identify solutions** and move forward as best you can. **Practice empathy** and focus on understanding the other person. Picture yourself walking in their shoes and get rid of the right-wrong mentality.
- **Example Thought:** I blame my significant other for the relationship issues we experienced. Why am I always treated this way, only if they put more effort into our relationship.
- **Reframed Thought:** A relationship takes two people to make it work. I am equally responsible for any issues we may have. I should apologize for my mistakes and try to move forward as best we can

# Catastrophizing: *Magnification*

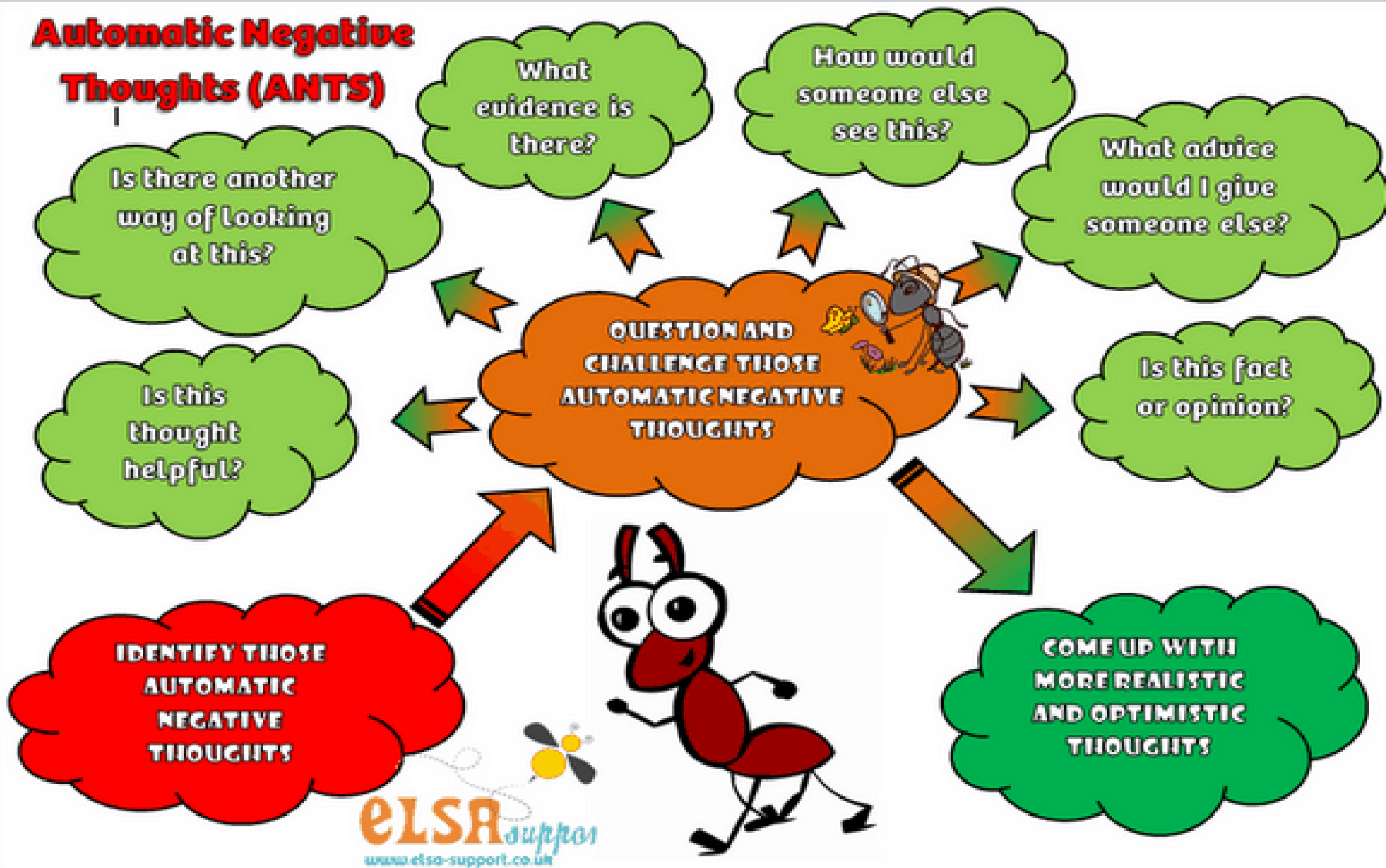
- **Distortion:** An over-exaggeration of a thought which leads to worries escalating quickly and becoming the *worst-case* scenario.
- **Challenge:** Take the negative event for what it is. Don't try to make it any more than it is. Reframe the situation by looking at opportunities rather than the catastrophic event you make it out to be.
- **Example Thought:** There is a lot of traffic on my way to work and I'm never going to get there on time.
- **Reframed Thought:** I may be late, but I will get there safely, in the meantime I can enjoy the radio.



# Catastrophizing: *Minimization*

- **Distortion:** Minimizing positive experiences. The importance of positive qualities is diminished.
- **Challenge:** Take the positive experience for what it is. Try not to diminish the importance by focusing on the positive qualities rather than turning it into a negative. Embrace the positive experience and take pride in your accomplishments.
- **Example Thought:** As an athlete, I win an award, but it doesn't seem like I accomplished much as others have already won this award.
- **Reframed Thought:** I won an award; I am proud of what I accomplished and grateful for how far I have come in my athletic career.

# Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTS)



# Overgeneralization

- **Distortion:** Focusing on a single event that has occurred and incorrectly concluding all similar events going forward will result in the same failure or negative experience.
- **Challenge:** Take that single negative event and believe you can create a different outcome in the future. Reflect on times where a single negative had a long-lasting outcome as you are expecting this one will. Identify any evidence that suggests this single negative event will impact all future events.
- **Example Thought:** I failed this exam; I feel like such a failure. I don't think I am smart enough to take this class, I will probably just fail it.
- **Reframed Thought:** I didn't pass this one exam, but in the past, I have always found a way to come back from a failed exam. I will work harder and try again the next time.

## ANTS

Automatic Negative Thoughts

**I'll forget everything.**

**People will ask questions I can't answer.**

**I'll stutter.**

**I'm going red.**

**I'll be boring.**

**I'll get confused.**

**I don't know enough.**

**Why am I doing this?**

## MATHs

More Accurate Thoughts

This is possible but unlikely. You might forget something. Most speakers do. But if you prepare well you can handle this. If you've got good notes you'll be able to find your place.

This is possible. But once again if you prepare well you will be able to overcome this.

What is your track record? Do you normally stutter? Most speakers trip up at some stage. If you prepare well you reduce the chances. But even if you do stutter, audiences are generally very forgiving.

Do you normally go red? Do people notice or is it just you? And even if you do go a bit red is that a problem? You might find it a bit uncomfortable but often the audience won't even notice.

You can reduce the chances of this by preparing well. Another thing to remember is that the standard of presentations is generally not very high so if you put in some effort you're likely to be better than many other presenters.

Have some good notes.

If you've prepared well you will know enough to give this talk. You don't have to know everything.

Well, that is an interesting question but the middle of a presentation is not the time to be answering it!

# How to Stop Negative Thinking in 6 Steps

- Negative Automatic Thoughts affect many of us due to our habitual tendency towards irrational thinking patterns.
  - This [Cognitive Behavioral Therapy](#) technique can be achieved in 6 steps by reframing negative thoughts and over time your thoughts will be replaced with more rational thinking.
1. Recognize and Isolate the Thought
  2. Write Down the Thought
  3. Identify the Distress Level
  4. Identify the Cognitive Distortion
  5. Challenge & Reframe Your Thoughts
  6. Reevaluate the Distress Level



# CHALLENGE AUTOMATIC NEGATIVE THOUGHTS WORKSHEET

## 1 RECOGNIZE & ISOLATE THOUGHT

Building awareness allows you an opportunity to challenge and refute those negative thoughts



1. Stop and pause for a moment, recognize what you are thinking isn't quite right
2. Pay attention to your body and emotions
3. Isolate and focus on the irrational thought and try to separate it from who you are
4. Think about what you are thinking about by having an external view of your thought

## 2 WRITE DOWN YOUR THOUGHT

Focus and think about what the thought is really about and write it out. After writing, you will feel a sense of relief that your mind has been emptied.

## 3 DISTRESS LEVEL

Identify the distress level (0-10):

0 = Calm 10 = Extreme

## 4 DISTORTION TYPE

Identify the cognitive distortion:

(Refer to list of cognitive distortions)

## 5 CHALLENGE & REFRAME THOUGHT

Challenge the cognitive distortion by evaluating evidence, focusing on positives, and avoid thinking in extremes (Refer to list of challenges):

1. Challenge & refute negative thoughts
2. Modify language and internal dialogue
3. Replace negative distortions with positive healthy thoughts
4. Write down the more reasonable reframed thought



## 6 REEVALUATE DISTRESS LEVEL

Reevaluate the distress level (0-10) and compare it to step 3. If the distress level has not decreased, consider repeating the exercise again.

Go through the worksheet each time you experience a negative thought and refer to the list of distortions if you need to.

This will help you get rid of negative thoughts and shift your thinking patterns towards a positive relationship with your mind. It takes time and practice, so don't be discouraged if you do not get it right away.

# Write Down Your Thought

- Writing down your thought might seem like a really simple step. But it is much more complex and beneficial than you realize.
- When you are experiencing an automatic negative thought, it can be difficult to pull yourself out of the thinking trap and write down what you are thinking about.
- Writing your thought enables you to have a higher level of thinking because you have to focus and think about what the thought was really about.
- This is again the metacognition.
- Writing helps you process your thoughts and emotions by:
  - clearing your thoughts and unloading all your emotions
  - giving you clarity and focus to process your feelings
  - creating positive self-dialogue with your mind
  - reducing stress and increases gratitude
- When you are finished writing you will feel a sense a relief that your mind has been emptied of that clutter. This will give you a sense of a clearer picture of what really happened because your mind can use that free space to focus.

# Recognize and Isolate the Thought

- Recognizing that you are experiencing a thinking error is a very important first step. This provides an awareness that allows you an opportunity to challenge and refute those thoughts.
- **When you experience an automatic negative thought:**
  - ***Pause*** for a moment
  - Try and recognize what you are thinking isn't quite right
  - Isolate and ***focus*** on that irrational thought
  - Recognize how it makes you ***feel***
  - Try to ***separate*** the thought from who you are. Think about what you are thinking about. Once you have an external view of your thought you have an opportunity to try to refute it.
  - This is known as **Metacognition** and occurs when your brain realizes, "Wait my thinking isn't quite right." It is a ***deeper level of thinking*** that allows you to think about what you are thinking.
  - This awareness provides an opportunity to allow you to ***understand, adapt, change, control***, and use your thought process in a positive and healthy way.

# Identify the Distress Level

- Identify the distress level your automatic thoughts make you feel. This will help rank the severity the negative thought is causing you.
- The distress level is ranked between 0 and 10.
- Zero meaning you are calm and peaceful with no distress at all.
- Ten means that the distress is extreme and is paralyzing.
- Rank the distress level based on how you feel; consider your emotions and any physical distress you may experience.

# Challenge & Reframe Negative Thinking

- Challenging cognitive distortions can be accomplished by:
  - Evaluating the evidence,
  - Focusing on positive thoughts, and
  - Avoid thinking in extremes.
- Each distorted thinking styles requires a unique solution to overcome
- You can overcome negative thoughts by:
  - Challenging and refuting negative thoughts
  - Modifying your language and internal dialogue
  - Replacing negative distortions with positive healthy thoughts
  - Writing down the more reasonable reframed thought



# Reevaluate the Distress Level

- After you have challenged and reframed the distorted thought, reevaluate the distress level to see if this exercise has helped.
- If your distress level has decreased and you are feeling better emotionally and physically after the exercise, then you have successfully altered your negative thought.
- If you don't feel like your distorted thought has been corrected, you can repeat the exercise again.
- You may not always be able to correct your thinking, but with practice, you will be able to automatically recognize the negative thinking traps while altering your mindset from negative to positive.



**The end!**

**Thank you for viewing and  
listening!**