

ANTS Can Be a Pest!

ANTS - 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

Do these “ANTS” bug you?



All-or-nothing thinking: You see things in black and white categories. If your performance falls short of perfect, you see it as a failure.



Overgeneralization: You see a single negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat.



Mental filter: You pick out a single negative detail and dwell on it exclusively so that your vision of all reality becomes darkened, like the drop of ink that discolours the entire beaker of water.



Disqualifying the positive: 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.



Jumping to conclusions: You make a negative interpretation even though there are no definite facts that convincingly support your conclusion.



Mind reading: You arbitrarily conclude that someone is reacting negatively to you and don’t bother to check it out.



The fortune-teller error: You anticipate that things will turn out badly and feel convinced that your prediction is an already-established fact.



Magnification (catastrophizing) or minimization: You exaggerate the importance of things (such as your goof-up or someone else’s achievement), or you inappropriately shrink things until they appear tiny (your own desirable qualities or the other fellow’s imperfections). This is also called the “binocular trick”.



Emotional reasoning: You assume that your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are: “I feel it, therefore it must be true.”



Should statements: You try to motivate yourself with shoulds and shouldn'ts, as if you had to be whipped and punished before you could be expected to do anything. "Musts" and "oughts" are also offenders. The emotional consequence is guilt. When you direct "should" statements toward others, you feel anger, frustration, and resentment.



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 behaviour 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 coloured and emotionally loaded.



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

Adapted From: Burns, David D., MD. 1989. The Feeling Good Handbook. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc.

The "Dog Poop" Story (Clinician can use this story to illustrate ANTS)

You are looking out the front window of your house and you see (name of neighbour #1) leaving the house for school in the morning. Neighbour #1 steps in dog poop on the sidewalk, looks down and says to himself/herself:

"I am such a loser." (ANT #1)

"I knew I should have stayed in bed today." (ANT #2)

"The rest of my day is ruined." (ANT #3)

"Why does this always happen to me?" (ANT #4)

"I am going to stink and everyone will laugh at me." (ANT #5)

Clinician asks: "How do you think the person was feeling?"

Protect Yourself from ANTS – Put On Your PANTS!



Clinician then continues with neighbour #2 and talks about how you can change ANTS into PANTS.

Positive: Helpful and "encouraging"

Automatic: It will take practice to get these to "pop" into your head

Neutral: impartial, unbiased

Thoughts: "The talking voice in your head" based on experience

You are looking out the front window of your house and you see (name of neighbour #2) leaving the house for school in the morning. Neighbour #2 steps in dog poop on the sidewalk, looks down and says to himself/herself:

"Huh, what a silly thing to do." (PANTS #1)

"It's no big deal, I'll wipe it off on the grass here." (PANTS #2)

"I better hurry so I won't be late for school." (PANTS #3)


"I am going to check with my friends to see who else has had this happen to them." (PANTS #4)

"In fact we should give a Poop certificate award to the person in my class who stepped in it the most times this year." (PANTS #5)

Clinician asks: "How do you think this person was feeling?" Talk about the difference in the 2 responses and how the feelings were influenced by "ANTS and then "putting on PANTS".

ANTs

Automatic Negative Thoughts



This always happens to me

I'm such a loser

I'll never be able to do this


[Empty speech bubble]

[Empty speech bubble]

[Empty speech bubble]

PANTs

Positive Automatic Neutral Thoughts



It's not the end of the world

It didn't work out this time but better luck next time

I'll give it a try

[Empty speech bubble]

[Empty speech bubble]

[Empty speech bubble]

Situation that made me feel bad:

What happened?

Who were you with?

Where did it happen?