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From the heart

Negative Thought - ANTS

Automatic Negative Thoughts - ANTS can feel overwhelming and stop us from doing things we want to do. They can affect all aspects of our lives. Knowing them and recognising them can take some of the power out of thought. Take a look at the negative thinking categories below and see if you recognise them in your own thinking.

All or nothing thinking: Also known as 'black or white thinking' - things are either right or wrong, good or bad. Can lead us to give up at the first small sign of failure or think too rigidly. · 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 that one little mistake or slip-up doesn't mean complete failure. Start afresh tomorrow. Try to take a middle-ground in situations where you are usually too rigid. 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. I only came second in the exam. I should have come first. That's fantastic, I came second! I have got more responsibilities so this will mean more work and longer hours. I have got more responsibilities. This is a great opportunity and means that I am valued and trusted. 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: Mind reading: Presuming we know what other people are thinking without looking at the evidence. · 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. What's the point? I know I am going to do badly in this exam. I'll never get the exam results I want. 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. • 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. • 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.

Compare and despair: Comparing yourself unfavourably to others. • I am so disorganised I will never be able to juggle things like Jane. • Why can't I go on expensive holidays like Laura? Don't feed the ANT! Remember, we are all different. We all have different things that we are good at and we all have different problems and challenges in our lives. If you find you are comparing yourself to someone else – consider what's a more helpful way of thinking?

Emotional thinking: Thinking that the way we feel about something must make it true. • I feel like a failure so I must be. • He thinks I'm an idiot • I feel anxious about the presentation so I know it's going to go badly. Don't feed the ANT! Recognise that how you feel about a situation is just a reaction to your way of thinking. If you make an assumption based on your feelings – challenge this viewpoint by looking for real evidence

Guilty thinking: Using words like 'should', 'must', 'have to' and 'ought to' can allow guilt to build up and can make you feel like you are failing. • I must finish all my homework today. • I should have done that already. • I ought to have known that was wrong. Don't feed the ANT! Be kinder to yourself. Using words like 'should', 'must' and 'have to' can make yourself feel guilty and add more pressure. Don't expect the impossible – be reasonable about what is possible or likely.

Magnification (Catastrophizing) and minimisation: Thinking an unlikely disaster is going to happen or attaching too much importance to a negative experience (or too little importance to a positive experience or situation). • I didn't understand in class today. I will never understand. • I think I left my hair straighteners on. The house is going to burn down. Don't feed the ANT! Try to recognise when you are magnifying (making bigger) the likelihood of something bad happening - consider just how likely it really is. What is a more realistic way of thinking?

Blaming others: Thinking others are always to blame for things that have gone wrong without taking responsibility for your own actions and ability to make things better. • I would have got that promotion if it wasn't for her. Don't feed the ANT! Try to remember that we are all responsible for our own lives and have the power to change how the future turns out.

Personalising: Blaming yourself for something that wasn't entirely your fault or thinking that something somebody says is a reaction to how they feel about you. • It's my fault we all missed the train. • Paul is in a bad mood today. It must be something I said to him. Don't feed the ANT! If something isn't your fault don't automatically blame yourself. This will have a negative effect on your self-worth and make you feel that you are always at fault.