**Understanding Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTs)**

*Brought to you by ProFriends Coaching & Mentoring*

### **What Are Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTs)? 🐜**

Automatic Negative Thoughts, or ANTs, are the instinctive, often subconscious thoughts that creep into our minds and are typically negative, self-critical, and unhelpful. These thoughts seem to come from nowhere and can quickly influence how we feel and act. For instance, after a small mistake, an ANT might tell you, "You always mess things up, you're not good enough, you are stupid."

While these thoughts can feel overwhelming and true, the real truth is, they are simply **thoughts**, not facts. At ProFriends, I believe in **self-compassion**, understanding that negative thoughts are part of the human experience. However, learning to notice, challenge, and reframe these thoughts can open the door to **greater resilience, confidence**, and a **calmer mind**.

### **Common Types of ANTs and How to Spot Them 🐜**

Recognising your ANTs is the first step in overcoming them. Below are some of the most common types:

* **All-or-Nothing Thinking**: Viewing things in black-and-white terms. If something isn’t perfect, it’s seen as a total failure.
* *Example*: "If I didn’t succeed at this project, I’m worthless."
* **Overgeneralisation**: Making sweeping conclusions based on a single event.

*Example*: "I didn’t get the promotion, so I’ll never succeed at anything."

* **Catastrophising**: Imagining the worst-case scenario in every situation.

*Example*: "I made a mistake; my boss is going to fire me, and I’ll lose everything."

* **Mind Reading**: Assuming you know what others are thinking, usually something negative about you.

*Example*: "She hasn’t replied to my email, so she must be angry at me."

* **"Should" Statements**: Criticising yourself (or others) with unrealistic or rigid expectations. I love the phrase "shoulding" I'm sure it's not a real word but to stop shoulding yourself is amazing.

*Example*: "I should always be calm under pressure. If I’m not, I’ve failed."

These thoughts happen automatically, often without conscious awareness. **They feel real, but they are distorted views of reality**. The good news? You can learn to manage them.

### **Reflecting on Your Own ANTs 🧠**

Take a moment to consider how these ANTs show up in your life. Use these questions as a guide to reflect on your thought patterns:

1. **When do I experience ANTs the most?**

Think about situations that trigger negative thoughts—like when you face challenges at work, conflict in relationships, or personal setbacks.

1. **What does my inner critic sound like?**

Write down some of the harsh things you say to yourself. Is it kind? Is it fair?

1. **How do these thoughts make me feel?**

Notice the emotions attached to your thoughts. Do they make you feel anxious, sad, or defeated?

**Tip**: Try journaling to track these thoughts. This simple habit can bring more awareness to your negative thinking patterns and make them easier to spot. I have a thought tracker sheet too if that would help, just ask.

### **Tools to Notice and Reframe Your ANTs 🛠**

At ProFriends, I emphasise **actionable strategies** to help you recognize, challenge, and change your ANTs. Here’s how to start:

#### **1. Pause and Label the Thought**

When you notice an automatic negative thought, don’t try to push it away. Instead, **pause** and give it a name / label it. Simply saying, “I’m having an ANT” helps distance you from the thought, showing that it’s just a thought, not a fact.

#### **2. Challenge the Thought**

Ask yourself:

* Is this thought **really** true?
* What evidence supports or contradicts this thought?
* Am I assuming the worst?
* What would I say to a friend who was thinking this way?

By challenging your thoughts, you start to see them for what they are—often exaggerated or unrealistic distortions.

#### **3. Reframe the Thought**

Once you’ve challenged the negative thought, try to **reframe** it into something more balanced or positive. For example:

* **ANT**: "I failed that presentation. I’m a disaster at public speaking."
* **Reframe**: "That presentation didn’t go as planned, but I learned some valuable lessons to improve for next time". The goal is not to replace negative thoughts with overly optimistic ones, but to create a more **realistic and supportive narrative**.

#### **4. Focus on Progress, Not Perfection**

ANTs thrive in environments where perfectionism rules. Remember, progress is key. Celebrate your small wins and be patient with yourself. **Growth** is a journey.

#### **5. Practice Self-Compassion**

Negative thoughts can erode self-esteem over time. Practicing self-compassion is like giving yourself a mental hug. When an ANT strikes, try saying something like:

* "It’s okay to make mistakes; I’m still learning."
* "I’m doing my best, and that’s enough."

Compassion doesn’t make us weak—it empowers us to keep moving forward with strength and understanding.

### **How ProFriends Can Help 🌟**

At **ProFriends Coaching & Mentoring**, I am committed to helping women develop the tools to manage ANTs and other challenges, both professionally and personally. Through our relaxed, supportive, and fun coaching style, we guide you in reshaping your thought patterns, boosting your confidence, and achieving a sense of balance and peace.

* Ready to tackle your ANTs and empower yourself to live more confidently?
  + **FREE 30-minute discovery call**

We’re here to help you manage life’s stressors, improve your well-being, and build resilience—one step at a time.

**Remember**: **A**utomatic **N**egative **T**hought**s** are not facts. They are mental habits that you can change. With practice, you can quiet your inner critic and replace it with a voice that supports, empowers, and strengthens you.