



DERAIL NEGATIVE THINKING

Positive psychology has shown that negative emotions can be harmful to health and possibly can even shorten a person's life span. One landmark study showed that individuals who reported that they infrequently experienced positive emotions, died an average of 10 years earlier than individuals who reported that they frequently experienced positive emotions.

LANDMARK STUDY

The landmark study referenced in the introduction above was conducted on 180 elderly and deceased catholic nuns. Researchers studied handwritten autobiographies each woman had written in her early twenties. The frequency of positive emotions in these early writings was scored and compared to mortality rates. The results were overwhelming. The group of nuns who reported experiencing the lowest percentage of positive emotions died an average of 10 years earlier as compared to the nuns who reported experiencing the highest percentage of positive emotions.

If you are a person who struggles with negative emotions, don't become discouraged by this study. Here's the thing, most emotions are preceded by or linked to the conscious thoughts we think. This is good news because we can modify the conscious thoughts that produce negative emotions. Persistent negative thoughts need to be met head on and derailed. This will take work and a committed effort to change persistent negative thoughts. The rest of this handout will give you ideas about how you can confront and derail negative thoughts.

LEARN METHODS TO DERAIL NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

It is helpful to become more aware of how often you think negative thoughts. This is just one idea which you can do to increase awareness. It is called "A Penny for Your Thoughts." Put about 20 pennies in your left pocket first thing in the morning. Every time you think a negative thought about yourself, someone else, situations throughout your day or current events, place one penny in your right pocket. At the end of the day, count how many negative thought pennies you accumulated. Do this awareness exercise for three days in a row. At the end of three days, have you noticed that there are certain negative thoughts that were repeated more often than others? Write these repeated and/or persistent negative thoughts on a piece of

paper.

Next you are going to learn about three different methods that can be used to combat and/or derail negative thoughts. These methods can be used on persistent negative thoughts or the occasional negative thought.

Snap Thoughts of Pessimism

You can learn to STOP pessimistic thinking. The word “STOP” symbolizes “Snap Thoughts Of Pessimism”. Here is how the STOP method works. Put a rubber band on your wrist. When you have a negative thought, forcefully say, “STOP!” and snap your wrist with the rubber band. It is very important to promptly interrupt negative thought patterns, before they have a chance to negatively impact the emotional center of your brain – causing your emotional center (limbic system) to heat up into a negative state.

Stomp ANTS

ANTS are Automatic Negative ThoughtS. You can stomp ANTs. Here is how:

1. Identify the automatic negative thought;
2. Immediately and firmly say “STOP!”
3. Replace the negative thought with an ‘Opposite Positive’ statement;
4. Repeat the positive statement several times;
5. If the negative thought is persistent – argue that the ‘Opposite Positive’ statement is true and the negative thought is NOT true. You will learn more about how to do this next.

Combat Stubborn Negative Thoughts

Some negative thoughts are stubborn. If you encounter a negative thought that you can’t STOMP or STOP, you will need to confront these negative thoughts with hard-nosed, confrontational self-talk.

Let’s say the persistent negative statement was, “I am so stupid.” Start by confronting the negative thought by asking, “What evidence is there that I am stupid?” Question the validity of the negative statement, “Is this all based on one mistake I made?” Ask for further clarification, “You mean I have never acted intelligently?” Ask for the facts and answer with facts, “I made one mistake, one day. It is human to make mistakes. One mistake does not equal a total lack of intelligence. Here is a list of intelligent actions I have taken during the last several days.” End this confrontational self-talk by repeating an opposing positive statement several times, “I have an exceptional brain!”

Positive Thinking Helps Combat Negative Thoughts

It takes 3 positive thoughts to neutralize 1 negative thought. Studies show that positive and negative information of the same importance does not hold equal weight in our minds. Each negative thought will produce a negative emotion with 3 times impact of an equally important positive thought with corresponding positive emotion. What does this mean for you? You need to purposely think 3 positive thoughts to neutralize each negative thought that you think. If you need some ideas about how to think more positively, check out the handouts titled *Positive Thinking Patterns* and *Positive Affirmations*. Found at the bottom of this web page <https://positivepatterns4life.com/think>.