

Identifying ANTS: Challenging Different Types of Automatic Thoughts

Worksheet

The types of automatic thoughts we have can impact how we feel, as well as our mental well-being.

Automatic Negative Thoughts, or ANTS, can guide our behavior without our realizing, and can be hard to control.

Becoming aware of your ANTS and replacing them with more adaptive, rational thoughts is an effective way to enhance your mood, health, and overall quality of life.

Instructions

This table explores 10 different types of ANTS. In the far right column, see if you can think of an example for each ANT. Examples are provided in the third column, and a space is provided in the final column for you to think of your own examples.

Understanding their characteristics is the first step to challenging automatic thoughts when you experience a trigger.

Replacing ANTS with new, helpful thoughts is only a matter of time and practice!

Type	Description	Example #1	Example #2
Dichotomous "All-or-nothing" Reasoning	Viewing things as either black or white, overlooking the possibility that things may lie on a spectrum.	E.g. "He's either being entirely honest, or he's out to get me."	
Arbitrary Inference	Drawing conclusions without all the facts.	E.g. "My phone has been silent all day, I haven't got the job."	

Type	Description	Example #1	Example #2
Minimization/ Magnification	Over-emphasizing the negative situational attributes while playing down positive ones.	E.g. "The road trip was not super because the car is slightly scratched."	
Personalisation	Feeling personally to blame for things that are beyond your control.	E.g. "I'm the reason you didn't get your homework done."	
Discounting the Positive	Identifying negatives in positive situations or events, or turning positive results into negative ones.	E.g. "They're only saying that because they want money."	
Overgeneralisation	Drawing overly broad conclusions from standalone events; using singular cases to draw conclusions about all other events.	E.g. "I was late, because I am bad at time management."	
Global Judgments	Applying deprecatory or negative labels to standalone incidents or people.	E.g. "She's absolutely useless at everything."	
Moral Imperatives	Applying a strict set of standards to everyone and everything, including oneself.	E.g. "It's not okay to cancel plans, ever."	
Emotional Reasoning	Using one's feelings about something to rationalize one's thoughts.	E.g. "I was nervous, therefore the class was badly run."	

Type	Description	Example #1	Example #2
Selective Abstraction	Using a single or small negative attribute to draw conclusions regarding a whole scenario.	E.g. "I tripped and fell, so the whole outing was a disaster."	

Challenging ANTS

ANTS are rarely rational or based in fact, so questioning them can be a useful way to deal with them when you notice them popping up.

Use these Challenge Questions to confront your ANTS as they occur, so that you can take control and begin replacing them with healthier thoughts.

1. Is there another possible way to view this situation or person? Are there any facts to back up an alternative explanation?
2. Is there any proof that my ANT is correct?
3. If my ANT is in fact true, what would be the worst that could happen?
4. How might I deal with things if that happened?
5. What outcomes might I expect if I believe in my ANT without challenging it?

