

Stomping the ANTs

Getting rid of pesky Automatic Negative Thoughts



Automatic Negative Thoughts or “ANTs” as Dr. Daniel Amen calls them, often tell you lies like: “You’re no good,” “Nobody likes you,” or “These kids are driving me crazy!” This negative self-talk can dramatically affect your mood. Here’s why: Whenever you think a thought, your brain releases neurochemicals that create feelings. Positive thoughts release positive chemicals and you feel happier. Negative thoughts release chemicals that make you feel angry, sad, or stressed.

You can stomp the ANTs by re-stating negative thoughts in a more truthful way. Instead of thinking “I never do anything right,” replace it with: “I may make some mistakes but I have a lot to offer.” Or when you’re feeling overwhelmed think, “I can do this!” You can change your self-talk to be more hopeful, positive, and accurate. You’ll feel happier and more confident.

For more information, read **The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook by Edmund Bourne.*

Below are 10 “species” of ANTs that creep into our thoughts and ruin our day. Put a check next to the type of A.N.T. that bothers you and write an example in the blank space. Then stomp them by writing a more hopeful, accurate, and positive way of viewing each situation.

SPECIES	A.N.T.	SQUASH ANTs WITH TRUTH
<input type="checkbox"/> 1. All or Nothing Thinking	“There’s nothing to do.”	“There are probably lots of things to do if I think about it.”
<input type="checkbox"/> 2. Always Thinking	“No one ever plays with me.”	“That’s silly. I have played with lots of kids.”
<input type="checkbox"/> 3. Mind Reading	“The teacher doesn’t like me.”	“I don’t know that. Maybe she is just having a hard day.”
<input type="checkbox"/> 4. Fortune Telling	“The whole class will laugh at me.”	“I don’t know that. Maybe they will like my speech.”
<input type="checkbox"/> 5. Labeling	“I am stupid.”	“Sometimes I make mistakes but I am not stupid.”
<input type="checkbox"/> 6. Focusing on the Negative	“My whole party was ruined by his teasing.”	“My party was fun except for the few minutes he was teasing.”
<input type="checkbox"/> 7. Thinking with Your Feelings	“I feel like such a loser. How can anyone like me?”	“I may need to change a few things but I’m a good person.”
<input type="checkbox"/> 8. Magnifying and Minimizing	“I got a terrible report card.”	“I may have gotten one ‘C’ but my other grades were good.”
<input type="checkbox"/> 9. Blame	“It’s the teacher’s fault.”	“I need to look at my part of the problem.”
<input type="checkbox"/> 10. Guilt Beatings	“It is all my fault and I’m a horrible person.”	“It was just an accident and I can do things to make it better.”

THE PENNY GAME

To become more aware of your ANTs, use this kid’s game by Richard Brozovich, Ph.D. and Linda Chase in *Say Goodbye to Being Shy*. Put ten pennies in your pocket every morning for a month. Every time you think a positive thought about yourself, move a penny to your “good” pocket. If you give mind-space to any ANTs, move a penny back to the holding pocket. Try to get all ten pennies in your “good” pocket each day. Note of how many you got each night. At the end of the month, reward yourself according to how well you met your goal.