

CHALLENGING AUTOMATIC NEGATIVE THOUGHTS (ANTs)

Although we all have unhelpful thoughts (ANTs) from time to time, and although we are not always very aware of them, the good news is they can be changed and that by challenging or questioning these thoughts, you can feel happier and more in control. Practice the following simple steps:

1. **Be aware** of what you are saying to yourself. Ask yourself –

*“What is going through my mind?” or
“What is it about this situation that is upsetting me?”*

2. **Challenge your thoughts.** Remember, just because you think something doesn't mean it's true. Ask yourself –

*Is this thought helpful?
Am I being realistic?
Is this an example of one of the common ANTs?*

3. Consider the following strategies & ask yourself some of these questions:

Look for evidence:

*What's the evidence for and against my thought?
Am I focusing on the negatives and ignoring other information?
Am I jumping to conclusions without looking at all the facts?*

Search for alternative explanations:

*Are there any other possible explanations?
Is there another way of looking at this?
How would someone else think if they were in this situation?
Am I being too inflexible in my thinking?*

Put thoughts into perspective:

*Is it as bad as I am making out? What is the worst that could happen?
How likely is it that the worst will happen? Even if it did happen, would it really be that bad? What could I do to get through it?*

4. **What is a more helpful thought?**

What can I say to myself that will help me remain calmer and help me achieve what I want to achieve in this situation?

If you think you'd benefit from a more detailed explanation of unhelpful thinking and how to manage it, consider Dr. Sharp's "The Happiness Handbook" as well as The Happiness Institute's series of happiness workbooks.