

Gain Control Over Negative Self-Talk

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“I’m so stupid.”

“I’m always messing things up.”

“No one ever wants to be with me.”

For those with ADD, these types of negative beliefs are common. They become ingrained from experiencing continual frustrations at school and work, the cruel things that others say during moments of frustration, and from the bullying that many children with ADD endure.

It’s important that ADD people learn to gain control over these thoughts because how we think “moment by moment” has a huge impact on how we behave in the future!

For example:

- An ADD child or teen may believe that they’ll fail in school — because that was their experience at some point in the past — *so they will not try.*
- An ADD adult may believe that they are doomed to have poor relationships — again, because that was their experience in the past — *so they will engage in the same, repetitive behaviors that impairs their ability to relate to others.*

These types of negative thoughts often “just happen,” so we call them *Automatic Negative Thoughts*. When we take the first letter from each word, it spells “ANT.”

Whenever ANTs creep into the mind, they must be killed! We kill them by talking back to them; if we don’t, ANTs become the seeds of future anxiety and depression.

Some people tell me they have trouble talking back to their ANTs because they feel that they are lying to themselves. Initially they believe that all of their thoughts *must be true*.

Don’t be fooled – your thoughts can, and will lie to you!

Killing ADD ANTs:

1. Whenever an automatic negative thought enters your mind, train yourself to recognize its type and write it down (see types below).
2. Talk back to the ANT – this takes away its power so you can gain control over your moods and feel better.

ANT Types:

1. **“All or nothing” thinking:** thoughts that are all good or all bad.
2. **“Always” thinking:** thinking in words like *always, never, no one, everyone, every time, everything.*
3. **Focusing on the negative:** only seeing the bad in a situation.
4. **Fortune telling:** predicting the worst possible outcome to a situation with little or no evidence for it.
5. **Mind reading:** believing that you know what another person is thinking even though they haven’t told you.
6. **Thinking with your feelings:** believing negative feelings without ever questioning them.
7. **Guilt beatings:** thinking in words like *should, must, ought, or have to.*
8. **Labeling:** attaching a negative label to your self or to someone else.
9. **Blame:** blaming someone else for the problems you have.

Examples:

ANT	Species of ANT	Kill the ANT
There’s nothing to do.	“all or nothing”	There are probably lots of things to do if I think about it for a little while.
No one ever plays with me.	“always” thinking	That’s silly. I have played with lots of kids in my life.
The boss doesn’t like me.	mind reading	I don’t know that. Maybe she’s just having a bad day. Bosses are people too.
The whole class will laugh at me.	fortune telling	I don’t know that. Maybe they’ll really like my speech.
I’m stupid.	labeling	Sometimes I do things that aren’t too smart, but I’m not stupid.
It’s my wife’s fault.	blame	I need to look at my part of the problem and look for ways I can make the situation better.

Help younger children kill their ANTs by repeating the negative thought back to them and then asking, “Can you be absolutely sure that this thought is true?”