NIU EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Understanding Your “Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTs)”


“Negative thoughts invade your mind like ants at a picnic” (Amen, pg 60). The nine different ways your thoughts lie to you and make situations seem worse than they are, are listed below. Think of these nine ways as nine different species of ANTs (Amen, pg. 64). When you can identify the type of ANT, you can take away the power they have over you.

1. **“Always/never” thinking:** thinking in words like always, never, no one, everyone, every time, everything.
2. **Focusing on the negative:** seeing only the bad in a situation
3. **Fortune-telling:** predicting the worst possible outcome to a situation
4. **Mind reading:** believing that you know what others are thinking, even though they haven’t told you
5. **Thinking with your feelings:** believing negative feelings without ever questioning them
6. **Guilt beating:** thinking in words like should, must, ought, or have to
7. **Labeling:** attaching a negative label to yourself or to someone else
8. **Personalizing:** investing innocuous events with personal meaning
9. **Blaming:** blaming someone else for your own problems — a red ant, as it is the most poisonous

**Exterminate Your ANTs** (Amen, pgs. 55-64)

1. When you notice an ANT entering your mind, recognize it, write it down, talk back to it.
2. When you hear yourself say an ANT, STOP and correct them.
3. Identify your favorite ANTs and use the following process to kill these ANTs (Amen, pg. 66)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANT</th>
<th>Species of ANT</th>
<th>Kill the ANT — talking back</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“You never listen to me.”</td>
<td>Always/Never Thinking</td>
<td>I get frustrated when you don’t listen to me, and I know you have listened to me and will again.</td>
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<tr>
<td>“The boss doesn’t like me.”</td>
<td>Mind Reading</td>
<td>I don’t know that. Maybe she’s just having a bad day. Bosses are people too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The whole class will laugh at me.”</td>
<td>Fortune-telling</td>
<td>I don’t know that. Maybe they’ll really like my speech.</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I’m stupid.”</td>
<td>Labeling</td>
<td>Sometimes I do things that aren’t too smart but that doesn’t mean that I am stupid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It’s your fault we have these problems.”</td>
<td>Blaming</td>
<td>I need to look at my part of the problem and look for ways I can make the situation better.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Changing your thinking, changes your feelings, and makes it easier to own your behavior because it is not all negative.

**Example:** My friend yells at me. I think she doesn’t like me. I feel unlikable and hurt.

My friend yells at me. I think she must be in a bad mood. I feel okay about myself & decide to talk with her.

My friend yells at me. I think maybe I did something. I feel concerned & talk to her.