panic

second guessing

disillusioned

confused

HELP!

worried

afraid

crazy   scared

fear

overwhelmed

diminished

perplexed

crisis

inferior

helpless

desperate

Self-blame

incapable

uneasy

paralyzed

Doubt

frustrated

anxious

threatened

hopeless

distressed

Change your negative thinking

Don't believe everything you are thinking

We all have lots of thoughts that go through our minds everyday. While many are helpful, some can be irrational and unhelpful. Many are not even true.

It's not that your brain is purposely lying to you, it's just that it may have developed some faulty or non-helpful connections over time. These are cognitive distortions, and they come in many forms. There are many ways our thoughts may be sabotaging us.

Cognitive distortions are biased perspectives we take on ourselves and the world around us. They are irrational thoughts and beliefs that we unknowingly reinforce over time, and then they become our automatic thoughts.

We must build awareness of these automatic negative thoughts - what they are, and when they happen, and what effect they have, before we can examine and challenge and replace them with healthy thinking.

You can take control of your thinking and moods and behaviors if you put in the work!

Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTs) are:

Involuntary/automatic. You don't decide to think these thoughts, but they've become hardwired over time and lurk and linger, controlling your moods and behavior, controlling the quality of your life. Without deliberate awareness you may not even realize you're having them.

Irrational These thoughts are generally distorted, irrational and illogical.

Enemies These negative thoughts appear to protect you from discomfort by persuading you to practice self sabotaging behaviors - like avoidance of something it has decided is a hazard or danger (socializing! a new career! opportunities! new relationships!) - or 'attack as a proactive defense' (often a defense against an imaginary slight), and so on . . . But actually, they just stop you living an exciting happy life!

Some examples of automatic negative thoughts:

I can't cope • Applying for jobs is a waste of time, there are no jobs. • I have nothing to offer anyone. • I'm a failure. Again. • I'm a bad person • Everything is just too hard. • I'm stupid. • My problems will never go away. • No one really cares what happens to me. • Nothing will ever work out for me. • There is nothing to look forward to. • I'm not ready to do things right now, maybe in a few months. • I can't do anything right. • What's the point anyway? • I should have taken care of this a long time ago, it's too late now. • This craziness will never go away.
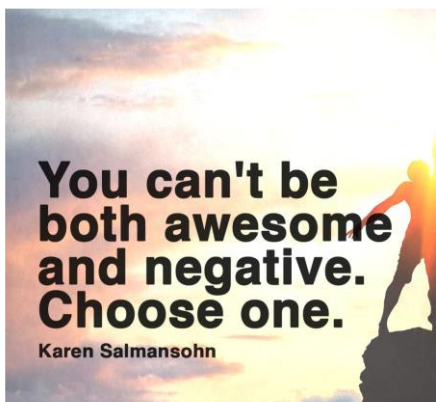
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To Ponder ...

WHAT MESSES US UP MOST IN LIFE IS THE PICTURE IN OUR HEAD OF HOW IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE.

POSITIVE PEOPLE ALSO HAVE NEGATIVE THOUGHTS. THEY JUST DON'T LET THOSE THOUGHTS CONTROL THEM.

90% OF OUR PROBLEMS ARE CAUSED BY OUR OWN THOUGHTS .

WHAT **CONSUMES** YOUR MIND, **CONTROLS** YOUR LIFE.

You can't be both awesome and negative. Choose one.
Karen Salmansohn

YOUR THOUGHTS CARRY YOU WHEREVER YOU WANT TO GO. WEAK THOUGHTS DON'T HAVE THE ENERGY TO CARRY YOU FAR!

CHANGE YOUR THOUGHTS, AND YOU CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

IF YOU CAN'T DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT, DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT.

NEVER GIVE A NEGATIVE THOUGHT AN INCH OR IT WILL TAKE A MILE.

DO NOT ALLOW NEGATIVE THOUGHTS TO ENTER YOUR MIND FOR THEY ARE THE WEEDS THAT STRANGLE CONFIDENCE.

ONCE YOU REPLACE NEGATIVE THOUGHTS WITH POSITIVE ONES, YOU'LL START HAVING POSITIVE RESULTS.
- WILLIE NELSON

DESTROY NEGATIVE THOUGHTS WHEN THEY FIRST APPEAR. THIS IS WHEN THEY'RE THE WEAKEST.
- SONGIDE MAKWA

Challenge your negative thoughts

By questioning your own thoughts, you can correct your own thinking.

WHAT IS THE EVIDENCE?

1. AM I CONFUSING A THOUGHT WITH A FACT? Just because you believe something to be true does not necessarily mean that it is. What does the evidence say: for it? against it? Could you be misinterpreting the evidence? Are you possibly basing this thought on feelings instead of facts?

Where did this thought come from? From someone else?; are they truly reliable? Are you having this thought out of habit, or do the facts really support it?

2. AM I JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS? Are you making assumptions/ inferences, or trying to interpret the situation without all the evidence? Are you looking at all the evidence or just those that support your thought (bias)?

WHAT ALTERNATIVES ARE THERE?

3. AM I ASSUMING MY VIEW OF THINGS IS THE ONLY ONE POSSIBLE? Might other people have different interpretations of the situation; what are those? Is this thought a likely scenario, or a worst-case scenario?

WHAT IS THE EFFECT OF THINKING THE WAY I DO?

4. WHAT DO YOU WANT FOR LIFE? What are your goals? Do you want to be happy and get the most out of life? Is the way you are thinking now helping you to achieve this, or is it standing in the way of what you want?

5. WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF THINKING THIS WAY? (cost-benefit analysis) Many distorted thought patterns do have some pay off – that is what keeps them going. Some degree of worry may be helpful in motivating you to prepare. Too much, on the other hand, may paralyze you and become a self-fulfilling prophecy. And some things, no matter how much you worry about them, you don't have any control over.

What is this thought costing you? What are the benefits of this thought? Rate how important each is to you. Do the disadvantages outweigh the advantages? If so, you can think of a new way of looking at things which will give you the advantages, but avoid the disadvantages of the old way.

6. AM I ASKING QUESTIONS THAT HAVE NO ANSWERS? Questions like "How can I undo the past?" "Why am I not different?", "What is the meaning of my life?", "Why does this always happen to me?", "Why is life so unfair?" Brooding over questions like these is a guaranteed way to sabotage yourself. If you can turn them into answerable questions, so much the better. If not, don't waste time on them.

RUMINATION is when we continually over-think past mistakes and shortcomings in a judgmental and overly-negative way. "I have this problem, which I can solve if I just keep thinking about it." Unless you're actively attempting to solve a problem – most ruminations are pointless and filled with negative thinking. If worry is irrational thinking about the future, rumination is irrational thinking about the past.

WHAT THINKING ERRORS AM I MAKING?

7. AM I THINKING IN ALL-OR-NOTHING TERMS?

Nearly everything is relative. People, for instance, are not usually all good or all bad. They are a mixture of the two. Are you applying this kind of black-and-white thinking to yourself?

8. AM I USING ABSOLUTE WORDS IN MY THINKING?

Watch out for words like always/never, everyone/none, everything/nothing. The chances are that the situation is actually less clear-cut than that. Mostly it's a case of sometimes, some people and some things.

9. AM I CONDEMNING MYSELF AS A TOTAL PERSON ON THE BASIS OF A SINGLE EVENT? Are you making a blanket judgement based on a single aspect of your life?

10. AM I CONCENTRATING ON MY WEAKNESS AND FORGETTING MY STRENGTHS? Are you overlooking the problems that you have handled successfully in the past? How have you coped with similar difficulties in the past? (You obviously have handled your problems well enough; after all, you are still around.)

THINKING ABOUT WORSE CASE SCENARIOS.

It's important to remind yourself that the worst-case scenario is **only one of many possible outcomes**. It can be helpful to also think about the best-case scenario. Finally, after identifying the extremes, consider what the most likely scenario is. Usually our minds drift toward the more extreme potential outcomes, when in reality, the extremes happen less often.

What are you predicting will happen, and what is the likelihood it will actually happen? Whatever the situation, consider what it is that you are *really* most afraid of. Oftentimes, just specifically identifying what we fear can help us realize our anxiety may be unfounded.

Once you identify the perceived threat, make some evidence-based predictions about how likely the threat is. How many times have you experienced this worst-case scenario before? What might be steps you could take to reduce the likelihood of your fear coming true? How could you influence the outcome more in your favor? Given the situation you fear, is this a plausible outcome?

If the worst-case were to happen, what would you do to cope with it? You will probably come up with a solution that could work. And you will likely learn from the situation and grow as a person.

THE WAY WE TALK TO OURSELVES CAN HAVE A RESOUNDING IMPACT ON OUR SELF ESTEEM, OVERALL MOOD AND GENERAL WELL-BEING.

Negative thought	Associated emotion when saying thought aloud	Evidence that does not support the thought	Alternative thought*	Associated emotion when saying thought aloud
I'll never get a good job.	Sadness Hopelessness	I have a strong work ethic. I have a good sense of judgement.	It may take time, but I will find a good job.	Hopefulness Empowered

*If you cannot think of an alternative thought, you might think about how your friend might frame the situation for you.

WHAT THINKING ERRORS AM I MAKING?

11. AM I BLAMING MYSELF FOR SOMETHING WHICH IS NOT REALLY MY FAULT? While some reflection can be helpful, this kind of self-blame is not justifiable. Do you reflexively default to self-blame whenever things go wrong?

12. AM I TAKING SOMETHING PERSONALLY WHICH HAS LITTLE OR NOTHING TO DO WITH ME? Are you assuming assume personal responsibility for events over which you have little or no control?

13. AM I EXPECTING MYSELF TO BE PERFECT? It is simply not possible to get everything right all the time.

14. AM I USING A DOUBLE STANDARD? You may be expecting more of yourself than you would of another person. How would you react to someone else in your situation? Would you be so hard on them? Be as kind to yourself as you would to someone else.

15. AM I PAYING ATTENTION ONLY TO THE BLACK SIDE OF THINGS? Are you, for instance, focusing on everything that has gone wrong during the day, and forgetting or discounting things you have enjoyed or achieved?

16. AM I EXAGGERATING THE IMPORTANCE OF EVENTS? What difference does this particular event really make in the scope of your whole life? What will you make of it in a week, a year, 10 years? Will anyone else remember what you now see as a terrible thing today? If you do, will you feel the same way about it? Probably not.

17. AM I OVERESTIMATING THE CHANCES OF DISASTER? How likely is it that what you expect will really happen? Is there really nothing you can do to change the course of events?

18. AM I FRETTING ABOUT THE WAY THINGS OUGHT TO BE, INSTEAD OF ACCEPTING AND DEALING WITH THEM AS THEY ARE? Are you living by 'fixed rules' and not accepting reality? (using words like 'ought', 'should', 'must' and 'can't')

19. AM I ASSUMING I CAN DO NOTHING TO CHANGE MY SITUATION? Pessimism makes you give up before you even start. You can't know that there is no solution to your problems until you try. Is the way you are thinking helping you to find answers, or is it making you turn down possible solutions without even giving them a go?

20. AM I PREDICTING THE FUTURE INSTEAD OF EXPERIMENTING WITH IT? The fact that you have acted in a certain way in the past does not mean to say that you have to do so in the future. If you predict the future, instead of trying something different, you are cutting yourself off from the chance of change. Change may be difficult, but it is not impossible.

Be kind to yourself

LEARN BETTER WAYS OF FACING WHATEVER HAPPENS.
SOME QUICK & EASY IDEAS.

OVERRIDE. RESET. RECALIBRATE.
"This is a negative thought. I'll observe it but not engage, as it will quickly flee."

PERSPECTIVE MATTERS.
"I've been here before and I've overcome. I can do this again."

I WILL DO MY BEST AND IT WILL BE ENOUGH
Done is better than perfect.

YES ... AND
Two opposites can be true at the same time. "Yes, I made that mistake AND I am generally quite capable."

THE BUT TWIST
Add the word 'BUT' to your negative thought! "I am scared to do this BUT ... I know I can handle it."

DIFFERENT LENS
Try on a different lens or way of looking at the situation. "If I were to look at the situation positively, how is it different?"

HOW DO I WANT TO FEEL?
Change your thoughts to more positive and your emotions will match. "If I want to be hopeful, I must change my thoughts to more hopeful ones."

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ANTs: Automatic negative thoughts

Types of Automatic Negative Thoughts and how you might address them

All or nothing. Black & white thinking; Everything is either good or bad.
Look for the 'gray' areas.

This is the end of my job. → I may have to do more training.

Focusing on the negative. Seeing only negatives in situations that have many positives, disqualifying the positives.
Look for positive aspects - even if you have to be creative to find them.

The day is ruined. → This is not how I expected it, but wow, what a story I will have to tell later.

Thinking with your feelings. Relying on how you feel to make decisions, rather than staying objective. (Emotional reasoning: If I feel this way, then it must be true.)
When you have a strong negative feeling check it out. Think about your thinking.

I feel like a failure. → I may not be good at that, but I have so many other strengths in different areas.

I feel like they are sick of seeing me. → What else might be going on that they can't see me today?

Labeling. Calling yourself (or someone else) names. **Separate the action from the person. Be kind to yourself.**

I'm so stupid. → What I did was not one of my best moves.

Absolute thinking. Thinking in absolute terms (*always, never, everyone, no one*, etc.) Thinking something that happened will "always" repeat itself or that you will "never" get what you want. **Look for examples that disprove these thoughts.**

They are always putting me down. → I can think of times when they appreciated my input.
No one will ever call me. → I have had many people call in the past.

Guilt Beatings. Beating yourself up with guilt, using words like *should, ought, must,* or *have to.* **Accept what can't be changed. And if it can be changed, work toward that.**

I should do … → I wish I could …
I must spend more time doing … → In the ideal world, I would be able to …
I ought to …. → It would be so wonderful if I could…

Fortune Telling. Predicting the worst possible outcome in a situation. When you predict bad things, you may inadvertently help make them happen (self-fulfilling prophecy). **Think about what it takes for the worst-case scenario to actually come true. How plausible is that after all?**

I am going to fail at this, and then [something bad] will happen. → Even if I don't do this well, how likely is that scenario going to happen?

Mind Reading. Believing you know what others are thinking even when they haven't told you.
Seek clarification before making assumptions.

They are mad at me and that is why they did that. → I really don't know what is going on in their mind.

> "I HAVE KNOWN A GREAT MANY TROUBLES, BUT MOST OF THEM NEVER HAPPENED."
> ATTRIBUTED TO MARK TWAIN

ANTs: Automatic negative thoughts

Blaming. Blaming someone else for your problems. **Recognize your role in the situation and take responsibility.**

> It wasn't my fault that … That wouldn't have happened if you would have… → It's so much easier to push the blame, but I do have a role in this.
> If only you had done [something different] it would not have happened. → Things just happen and there doesn't have to be someone to push the blame on.

Personalizing. Believing events Inserting personal meaning into the situation, including self-blame. **Think of other possible reasons why the event happened that don't have to do with you.**

> They are doing that because I did … → It just may be that they are having a bad day. I wonder what is going on for them.
> It's my fault that this didn't work out. → There are many factors involved here, I am just a part of the picture.

And a few others…

Over-generalization. Coming to a general conclusion based on a single incident or a single piece of evidence. If something bad happens just once, you expect it to happen over and over again. **Remind yourself that this is a single incident.**

> I messed up this interview, I will never get a job. → OK, that didn't go so well. Onto the next.

Over-reacting. Responding to an incident more strongly than is necessary or appropriate. **Focus on the big picture in life.**

> My friend hasn't answered my text in 3 hours. That's it, we are over. → I wonder why she hasn't yet answered. It could be one of so many reasons.

Unrealistic expectations. Expectations that are not sensible or likely to actually play out exactly as you envision them. **Reflect on the effect of the expectation: "Does [the expectation] help me be who I want to be? Does it help me go where I want to go?"**

> I have to get this perfect. Nothing less is good enough. → I will do my best.
> The event has to go without a hitch. → I expect and accept that something won't go exactly as planned, I wonder which one it will be?

Magnification. Exaggerating the importance of your problems or shortcomings, or minimizing the importance of your desirable qualities. Or catastrophizing a situation. **Remind yourself that unpleasant experiences — not having things go as you want — are an inevitable part of life.**

> Since I can't pay this bill, my credit rating will go down the tubes and I'll lose the house. → This is a tough time, we will get over it somehow.

Double standards. Applying a different set of standards for yourself and others. **Be fair and kind to yourself.**

> It may be good enough for them, but I hold myself to higher standards. → I need to be kind to myself too.

Comparisons. Noticing the difference between yourself and others (in this case, putting yourself at the lower side). **Remind yourself that everyone has flaws, limitations and weaknesses, and that most people only show off the highlights of their lives.**

> I wish I was as [whatever] as that person. → I am pretty awesome in [these] ways, even if I don't have [whatever].
> It seems like that person has it all together. → No one has a perfect life; I may not know their limitations, but they have some.

The ANT model has been developed by Dr. Daniel G. Amen

Reframing automatic negative thoughts (ANTs)
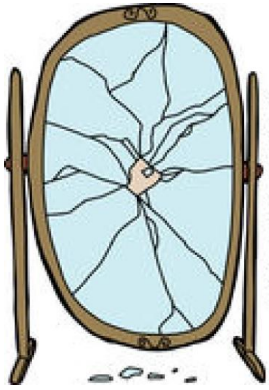
You made a mistake or something didn't pan out as you had envisioned.

So you have an initial (negative) thought. "I am a failure." This brings on negative and sabotaging emotions such as sadness and hopelessness.

However, if you challenged those thoughts, you'd have a different outcome. "I am hard on myself. I don't always succeed, but there are many times that I do."

Then, using the new framing of the situation, you can have more positive and realistic thoughts such as, "I don't have to be best at everything", "I'm going to work through this - like I always do", "I am new at this; I haven't mastered it yet." These foster more positive and encouraging emotions like hopefulness and empowerment.

It is helpful to recognize what type of negative thought you are dealing with, so you can address your thoughts in a more focused way.

Automatic Negative Thought	Alternative Thinking/ Positive Thought	Type of ANT
I made a mistake and now I've ruined everything.	I am aware of my mistake and it is upsetting to me which means it is important too me. I will learn from this about how to do this differently next time.	All or nothing
I'm a failure; I may as well give up.	I learned that this way doesn't work for me. I'm making progress, I just need to find a way that does work.	Focusing on the negative
I should have done better.	I wish I did better, but I did give it a good try.	
I feel like no one likes me; I'm never coming back here.	I am new here and having a hard time meeting new people.	Thinking with your feelings
I'm weak.	I am human. This is an area that I need to strengthen.	Labeling
I'm so stupid.	I made a mistake that I will learn from.	
Things always go wrong.	This didn't go so well. Next time will be better.	Absolute thinking
Things never work out.	More often than I'd like, things don't work exactly as I had hoped.	
I can't stand it.	I don't like it, but I'll deal.	Catastrophizing
This should not be happening.	This had to happen – since it did happen.	

your turn...

By identifying and reframing these habitual ways of negative thinking, you can not only start to feel better in the moment but in the long-run, you can train your minds to think about the world in a more realistic and balanced way.

Start small. Pick a particular area that you want to really work through; don't try to reframe everything, every time. This takes practice.

When you realize that you are thinking a negative thought:

1. **Hit the pause button** and ask yourself "What is going on here?"

2. **Identify the trigger.** What brought on the initial distressing emotions and thoughts.

3. **Name the type of negative thought**, and the emotions it brings up for you.

4. **Challenge the thought.** What is the evidence that disproves the thought? (ex: "I really don't know what is going on in her mind.)

5. **Come up with alternative possibilities**, and as applicable, evidence to support these. (ex: "I have overcome this before.")

6. **Reframe it to a positive thought** and notice what emotions you are now feeling.

you can do this...

CONFIDENCE VS FEAR

- When we act from FEAR we are being REACTIVE.

- When we act from CONFIDENCE, we are being PROACTIVE.

- **Confidence is possible... for everyone... in every situation. It comes from within.**

- **Courage** is doing even when you are in 'scared' mode. This gets results, which builds your confidence and courage. In a virtuous circle.

Keep a thought journal

Actually writing rather than thinking will help you see your words and solidify your new way of thinking.

the thought
trigger
type
challenge
alternatives
reframe