

Shifting your thoughts & Shifting Your Mood

THE HABIT OF AUTOMATIC- NEGATIVE THINKING

Anxiety, sadness, frustration, and anger can be very strong feelings. When we feel overwhelmed by strong feelings, we can sometimes act in ways that are against our values or who we wish to be. These feelings and behaviors are often exacerbated by automatic negative thinking patterns. Psychologists call unhelpful negative thinking patterns "thinking traps" because they can get us stuck in negative emotional loops.

Negative thinking is sometimes called automatic thinking. This is because it can happen without conscious awareness.



THINKING TRAPS

Thinking traps involve jumping to negative conclusions without proof that those thoughts are true. Once a thought occurs, we assume it is true because we thought it! These thoughts can get in the way of feeling good and can stop us from doing the things we want to do. One way to limit their power is to practice becoming more aware of them.



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Thinking Traps

Explained

BELOW ARE SOME OF THE MORE
COMMON THINKING TRAPS

ALL OR NOTHING THINKING

Thinking in extremes rather than seeing different possibilities. For example, "I'm going to fail because I didn't know *everything* on the exam."

CATASTROPHIZING

Imagining the worst situation and envisioning that we won't be able to handle it. For example, when feeling overwhelmed or upset, thinking, "This is the *worst* day of my life."

MIND READING

When we think we know what someone else is thinking and/or feeling, and assume that it is negative. For example, you might see someone not respond to you and think, "They don't like me."

FORTUNE TELLING

When we think we know a future outcome before it happens. After applying to a job, you might think, "I'm not going to get the job."

DISQUALIFYING THE POSITIVE

Overly focusing on the negatives in a situation or ourselves without acknowledging the positive parts. For example, "I *always* mess up my math homework."



How To Break the Habit

4 STEPS TO BETTER THINKING

1. IDENTIFY YOUR THOUGHTS

Step one, is to identify the thoughts that are getting in the way. By doing this, we can identify which thinking trap we are up against.



I notice myself feeling worried after the thought, "My friends have not texted me all night, they must hate me."
I am engaging in Mind Reading



2. QUESTION THE EVIDENCE

Our negative thoughts are often guesses and that leaves room for us to ask for proof that our thoughts are true. In this step, we want to question and challenge our negative thoughts.



I might ask, "How do I know for sure what they are thinking?" or "Is there any other reason my friends could be not texting me?"

3. COME UP WITH A MORE HELPFUL THOUGHT

In step 3, we create an accurate picture using hard facts to make a more realistic thought. This step helps us remove some of the assumptions that we made.



It might be more realistic for me to think "Maybe my friends are busy because we have a lot of homework."



4. REWARD YOURSELF

When you act against your habit to think negatively, it is hard, so be sure to praise yourself for your efforts.



I might reward myself by saying "You did a great job!" or tell someone I am close with about my accomplishment.