Stomping ANTs (Automatic Negative Thoughts)

**What to Know**

ANTs are **a**utomatic **n**egative **t**houghts that affect your mood, reduce your happiness, and magnify grief. ANTs can ruin your day because your brain immediately releases chemicals that affect every cell in your body when you think negative thoughts. The thoughts may not even be true, and if you do not question false thoughts, they steal your happiness. When you think positive, happy, hopeful thoughts, your brain releases chemicals that make you feel good. You will feel more confident and happier. The habit of negative thinking can have long-term effects on your health and well-being.

If you do not question or correct false, negative thoughts, you believe them and “act” as if they are true. Believing every thought contributes to anxiety, depression, relationship problems, and complicated grief.

You can stomp the ANTs and replace them with helpful thoughts by re-stating negative thoughts in a more realistic and truthful way.

Here are the steps to stomp the ANTs. Whenever you feel sad, mad, stressed out, overwhelmed, nervous, or out of control, stomp the ANTs!

1. Write down any automatic negative thoughts (ANTs) you have. This helps them get out of your head.

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2. Identify the ANT species. There are 12 types of ANTs. Check off the ANTs you need to stomp.

\_\_\_\_ All-or-Nothing – things are either all good or all bad

\_\_\_\_ Less-Than – seeing yourself as less than others, or making comparisons

\_\_\_\_ Just-the-Bad – seeing only the bad in a situation

\_\_\_\_ Guilt Beatings – thinking in words like should, must, ought to, or have to

\_\_\_\_ Labeling – attaching a negative label to yourself or someone else

\_\_\_\_ Fortune-Telling – predicting the worst possible outcome for a situation with little or no evidence

\_\_\_\_ Mind Reading – believing you know what others are thinking

\_\_\_\_ If-Only and I’ll-Be-Happy-When – arguing with the past and wishing for the future

\_\_\_\_ Blame – blaming someone else for your problems

\_\_\_\_ Thinking-with-Feelings – letting your thoughts be influenced by upsetting feelings

\_\_\_\_ Always-Thinking – using words like always and never

\_\_\_\_ Magnify and Minimize – focusing on the bad or ignoring the good

3. Are your ANTs true? 100% true? Write down the thoughts that are 100% true.

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4. How do you feel when you have these thoughts? How would feel if the thoughts disappeared?

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5. Make ANT-killing a daily habit. This takes practice. When you make stomping ANTs a daily practice, you will feel less anxious and upset – and less trapped in past hurts or loss. Now, let’s try it!

**What to Do**

On the chart below, see how often you can stomp ANTs every day for two weeks. Write down the thought and identify the ANT species (use the list above). Stomp the ANT with a true statement. Read the examples below.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Thought** | **Identify the ANT species** | **True statement** |
| *It’s my brother’s fault!* | *Blame* | *I actually broke the lamp, and I need to tell my parents.* |
| *It’s all my fault and I’m a terrible person!* | *Guilt Beatings* | *It was an accident and I’ll do something to make this situation better.* |
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| **Thought** | **Identify the ANT species** | **True statement** |
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Here’s a fun bonus exercise! Put 10 pennies in your pocket every morning for a month. Every time you think a healthy, positive thought about yourself, move a penny to the “good” pocket. If you allow ANTs to invade your thoughts, move a penny back to the holding pocket. Try to get all 10 pennies in your “good” pocket every day. At the end of the month, give yourself a reward if you met your goal (consistently getting 10 pennies in the “good” pocket).

**Reflections on This Exercise**

Was this exercise easy or hard? Why?

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How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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 *Adapted from Dr. Daniel Amen, who coined the term ANTs: https://www.amenclinics.com/blog/do-you-have-an-ant-infestation-in-your-head/*