



KILL THE ANTS (AUTOMATIC NEGATIVE THOUGHTS)

Dr. Daniel Amen coined this term in the early 1990's after a hard day at the office, during which he had several very difficult sessions with suicidal patients, teenagers in turmoil, and a married couple who hated each other. When he got home that evening he found thousands of ants in his kitchen. As he started to clean them up, an acronym developed in his mind. He thought of his patients from that day - just like the infested kitchen, his patients' brains were also infested by **Automatic Negative Thoughts** (ANTs) that were robbing them of their joy and stealing their happiness. He started teaching patients how to eliminate the ANTs because they are what drives depression, what stokes anxiety, and what fuels negativity.

Every single time you have a thought, your brain releases chemicals.

- Every time you have a sad, hopeless, mad, cranky, unkind, judgmental, or helpless thought, your brain immediately releases chemicals that make your body feel awful.
- Your hands get cold and wet, your muscles get tense, your heart beats faster and your breathing becomes shallower.
- The activity in your frontal and temporal lobes decreases which negatively affects your judgment, learning and memory.

The opposite is also true!

- Whenever you have a **happy, hopeful, loving, kind, or positive** thought, your brain releases a completely different set of chemicals.

- Your hands get warmer and dryer, your breathing becomes deeper and more regular, your muscles relax, your blood pressure decreases, and your brain works better.

So, if you want to eradicate depression, anxiety, and negativity from your life, you need to work on disciplining your mind to get rid of the ANTs and developing an ANTeater to patrol the streets of your mind.

Here are a few ANTs you need to learn to identify:

1. **FORTUNE TELLING:** This is the ANT of almost anyone who has a panic disorder. They are masterful at predicting the worst, even though they don't have any evidence.
2. **MIND READING:** Where you arbitrarily believe that you know what someone else is thinking, even though they didn't tell you. Many people do this, and more often than not it gets them into trouble. It's a major reason why people have trouble in relationships.
3. **GUILT BEATINGS:** Thinking with words like should, must, ought and have to. The words we use to talk to ourselves are very important. Guilt is not a very good motivator for change. Telling yourself "I should go see my grandmother" rather than "I want to spend time with my grandmother" only serves to make you feel negative.
4. **BLAME:** Whenever you blame someone else for the problems in your life, you are a victim and you can't do anything to change it. Many of us play the blame game, but it rarely helps us. Stay away from blaming thoughts and take personal responsibility for changing the problems you have.
5. **LABELING:** Calling yourself or someone else a derogatory name. This diminishes your ability to see situations clearly and labels are very harmful.

So now that you have met some of the ANTs that rob you of your happiness and peace of mind, what do you do about them? Whenever you find yourself feeling mad, sad, nervous, or out-of-control:

1. **Write it down. Writing down what you are thinking will help you identify which ANT species is infesting your mind.**
2. **Investigate it. Ask yourself if it is even true.**
3. **Talk back to it. Challenging negative thoughts (killing the ANTs) takes away their power and gives YOU control over your thoughts, moods, and behaviors.**

Learning how to kill the ANTs by developing an internal ANTeater has been shown in scientific studies to be as effective as [antidepressant medications](#) to treat anxiety and depression! Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTs) can make

it difficult to make decisions; lower your self-esteem; strain relationships; and can lead to depression, anxiety, and even anger.

Other Resources:

- Dr. R. Murali Krishna, MD has a podcast on ways to change negative patterns of thinking: [Changing Colors](#)
- Read more about the power of positive thinking in the On Your Health blog article called [Think Positive!](#)
- Here are some Suggested Apps

[Pacifica - Anxiety, Stress and Depression Relief](#)

[Hello Mind](#)

[Think Up: Positive Affirmations](#)

[For You. For Health. For Life.](#)
