

Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTs)

Adapted from the work of Daniel G. Amen, M.D. | Reformatted for use in EFT sessions with Jen DeMarco

Automatic Negative Thoughts — or “ANTs” — are the habitual, often unconscious thoughts that creep in and steal our peace. They can make us feel anxious, unworthy, or hopeless, even when nothing in our outer world has changed. Just like real ants in a kitchen, one or two may not seem like much — but left unchecked, they multiply and create chaos. The good news? You can learn to notice them, challenge them, and choose thoughts that bring you back to truth, presence, and self-compassion.

Why Your Thoughts Matter

Every thought you think changes your body chemistry.

Negative thoughts release stress chemicals that make you feel tense, heavy, or anxious.

Positive, hopeful thoughts release calming chemicals that help your body relax and heal.

Thoughts are powerful — and most importantly, they're trainable.

When you begin to question your thoughts rather than automatically believe them, you reclaim your power. You shift from being at the mercy of your mind to consciously partnering with it.

Common Types of ANTs

| Type of ANT | How It Sounds |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| All-or-Nothing Thinking | “If I can’t do it perfectly, I’ve failed.” |
| Always Thinking | “You never listen.” “This always happens to me.” |
| Focusing on the Negative | “Everything went wrong today.” |
| Fortune Telling | “This will never work out.” |
| Mind Reading | “They must think I’m ridiculous.” |
| Thinking with Your Feelings | “I feel scared, so something must be wrong.” |
| Guilt Beatings | “I should have known better.” “I have to do this.” |
| Labeling | “I’m such a failure.” “She’s impossible.” |
| Blame (the Red ANT) | “It’s all his fault.” |

The ANT-Killing Process

When you notice yourself feeling low, reactive, or out of control, pause and check for ANTs. Use the worksheet below to help you gently challenge them.

1. **Notice** — What thought just went through your mind?
2. **Name** — What type of ANT is it?
3. **Neutralize** — Talk back to it with a truer, more compassionate statement.

Examples

| ANT | Type | How to “Kill” It |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| My partner never listens to me. | Always Thinking | That’s not true. They often listen. Today they might just be distracted. |
| My boss doesn’t like me. | Mind Reading | I can’t know that for sure. I’ll focus on doing my best and communicating |
| I’m a failure. | Labeling | Sometimes I make mistakes, but many times I succeed. I’m learning. |
| It’s my husband’s fault. | Blame | I’ll take responsibility for my part and see what I can change. |

Kill the ANTs Worksheet

When you notice an ANT, write it down, name it, and respond with a more compassionate truth.

| What's your ANT? | What type of ANT? | How can you talk back to it with truth or compassion? |
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Your thoughts aren't facts. They're just mental weather passing through. The more you practice noticing and re-framing them, the calmer and clearer you'll feel — in your mind, your body, and your relationships.