



DEALING WITH NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

What are negative automatic thoughts?
Identifying thinking errors in our self-talk.



Thoughts play a powerful role in influencing our emotions and behavior, sometimes even without our awareness. And vice-versa.

Thoughts

Feelings

Behavior

Negative Automatic Thoughts (NAT) are those that seem to pop-up quite automatically and are negatively colored as their name indicates. The problem with NATs is that they are not always accurate.

Let's look at an example

Reena has been feeling anxious about a presentation in college. She has prepared well for it but still feels jittery and nervous. On the day of the presentation, it is raining heavily and she misses her bus. This makes her even more upset.

! "This always happens to me! I will be late for college and my presentation will be horrible"



Reality is that she can be late and still make a good presentation. Although she missed her bus today, she's otherwise always on time. So this does not 'always happen to her'.
How can she correct this error in thinking?

'Oh! I wish I hadn't missed my bus on the day of my presentation. I would have liked to be on time today' ✓

Thoughts Traps are thinking errors that may lie beneath automatic negative thoughts. These errors interfere with thinking clearly and push towards thinking in ways that may trap us in a bad situation or make a bad situation worse.

Let us get to know some of these common thought traps.

ALL OR NONE THINKING

OVER-GENERALIZATION

SELECTIVE ABSTRACTION

DISQUALIFYING THE POSITIVE

JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS

MAGNIFICATION OR MINIMIZATION

EMOTIONAL REASONING

SHOULD STATEMENTS

LABELING

PERSONALIZATION



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Let's get to know about
COMMON THOUGHT TRAPS



ALL OR NONE THINKING

When a person thinks in very absolute Black and White categories and fails to see the grey areas in between. It is also called Polarized Thinking.

"I got below 80%. Something is totally wrong with me"



PERSONALIZATION

When a person believes that he/she is responsible for events and situations even if they are not entirely under their control.

"My friend got scolded in school for not completing assignment. It's entirely my fault, I should have helped him"



JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS

When a person makes conclusions with little or no evidence to support it.

"They are laughing because they don't like me and must be gossiping about me"



OVER-GENERALIZATION

When a person uses one or a few negative experiences to make conclusions which are broad and faulty.

"I made a mistake in answering the first question. My whole paper is spoilt"



CATASTROPHISING

When a person believes that the worst negative outcome will happen or has happened, by magnifying the negatives or exaggerating their significance.

"I am 5 minutes late to the meeting, I will be thrown out of this team"



LABELING

When a person attaches a negative label to oneself, based on one or few instances or characteristics.

"This person broke our relationship. I am a failure"



SHOULD, OUGHT, MUST

When a person has a strong notion that things should/must be a certain way.

"I must behave perfectly"



SELECTIVE ABSTRACTION

When a person selectively picks out a negative detail from a situation, while filtering out the positive aspects, concluding that the whole situation is negative.

"This means I am a bad player; I can't do my job well"



DISQUALIFYING THE POSITIVE

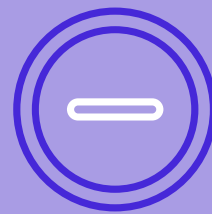
When a person tends to transform neutral or positive experiences into negative ones.

"They are just being nice"



The best way to deal with these NATs is by identifying and becoming aware of the errors in thinking contained in them. When you experience a negative thought, take a moment to check if there maybe a thinking error/thought trap underlying it. Identifying the trap/error can help you in changing your thought to a more realistic one.

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Now that you're familiar with what the Negative Automatic Thoughts are, let's try to identify some of the negative thoughts that you maybe experiencing.

FIND YOUR NAT'S

Write down negative thoughts as and when these occur to you in various situations. Try not to filter them.

Let's try to identify your thinking patterns STEP-BY-STEP

STEP 1: Select one thought from above

STEP 2: Look into the THOUGHT TRAPS list and identify the ones that may apply to your selected thought.

STEP 3: Ask yourself one or more of these questions to challenge your thoughts:

- Am I confusing a thought with a fact?
- If my loved one had this thought, what would I tell them?
- When I felt this way in the past, what helped me feel better?
- What's the worst that can happen and how can I deal with it?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of thinking this way?
- What have I learnt from prior experiences that could help me now?
- Are there any strengths/positives in me or the situation that I'm ignoring?
- 5 years from now, if I look back at this situation, will I look at it differently?
- What another way of looking at this situation, what would be the effect of that?
- Can any of my experiences show that this thought is not completely true all the time?

The greatest weapon against stress is our ability to choose one thought over another- William James