

SCHOOL REFUSAL BEHAVIORS & PERSUASIVE THINKING

Automatic Thoughts

The dialogue of thoughts that pop into your head all day are called automatic thoughts. They come up suddenly on their own with no effort. According to the National Science Foundation, we have an estimated 12,000-60,000 thoughts per day. That is an unbelievable number of thoughts that affect our feelings, fears, worries, and self-worth.

Aaron Beck developed the concept of Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTs). ANTs are normal, but may cause negative distorted thinking. ANTs are negative ideas about self, the world, and/or the future. ANTs are derived from the fight, flight, or freeze part of our brain.

These negative thoughts affect overall mental health: they can decrease self-esteem, increase anxiety and stress, and contribute to symptoms of depression.

The APA Dictionary of Psychology defines them as "thoughts that are instantaneous, habitual, and nonconscious." ANTs can also be referred to as "routinized thoughts."

Dr. Beck found that "healthy thinking boosted brain function, while negative thinking rapidly decreased the activity in temporal lobes, which play a role in processing information, emotion, memory, and language" (Vallejo).

To recognize ANTs, pay attention to the language used in response to a trigger. Typically triggers occur by certain people or situations that cause uncomfortable feelings. Examples may be: "I'm just bad at...", "Why bother trying, it's no use," "I'll never be able to...", and "Nobody likes me." Negative thinking can also manifest physically in headaches, stomachaches, or dizziness; it can manifest behaviorally in refusing to talk, forgetfulness, or being overly critical of self (Vallejo).



COMMON ANTS

Unfortunately, 95% of our ANTs repeat every day, becoming habitual. Habitual, repetitive ANTs lead to cognitive distortion. Habitual ANTs trigger emotions and emotions often lead to behaviors, especially when emotional regulation is lacking.

Our distorted thoughts are inaccurate and happen automatically. We must take notice to avoid their powerful, negative effects.

There are many types of cognitive distortions, including:

Cognitive Distortion	Definition
Overgeneralization thinking	Expecting something negative in all situations based on a previously bad experience.
Catastrophizing thinking	Expecting the worst possible outcome in even the most unlikely situations.
Personalizing events thinking	Blaming yourself for events outside of your control.
Jumping to conclusions thinking	Making an unwarranted conclusion without all the facts.
Relying on emotions for reason thinking	Assumes emotions as evidence for decision making.
All or nothing thinking	There is no room for any middle ground.
Should statement thinking	Mistakes are unacceptable causing feelings of guilt, anger, resentment, and shame.
Discounting positive thinking	When positive experiences do not count – it is either unimportant or due to chance.
Focusing on negative thinking	Turning everything into something wrong.
Fortune-telling thinking	The tendency to predict a poor future or outcome.
Blaming thinking	Blaming everyone for all that goes wrong.
Less than thinking	When comparing yourself to others, you are “not enough.”
Mind reading thinking	Assumes the knowledge of what others think of you.
Labeling thinking	Taking a label and applying it as their identity instead of an act or thought.

HELP FOR SCHOOL REFUSAL BEHAVIOR (SRB)

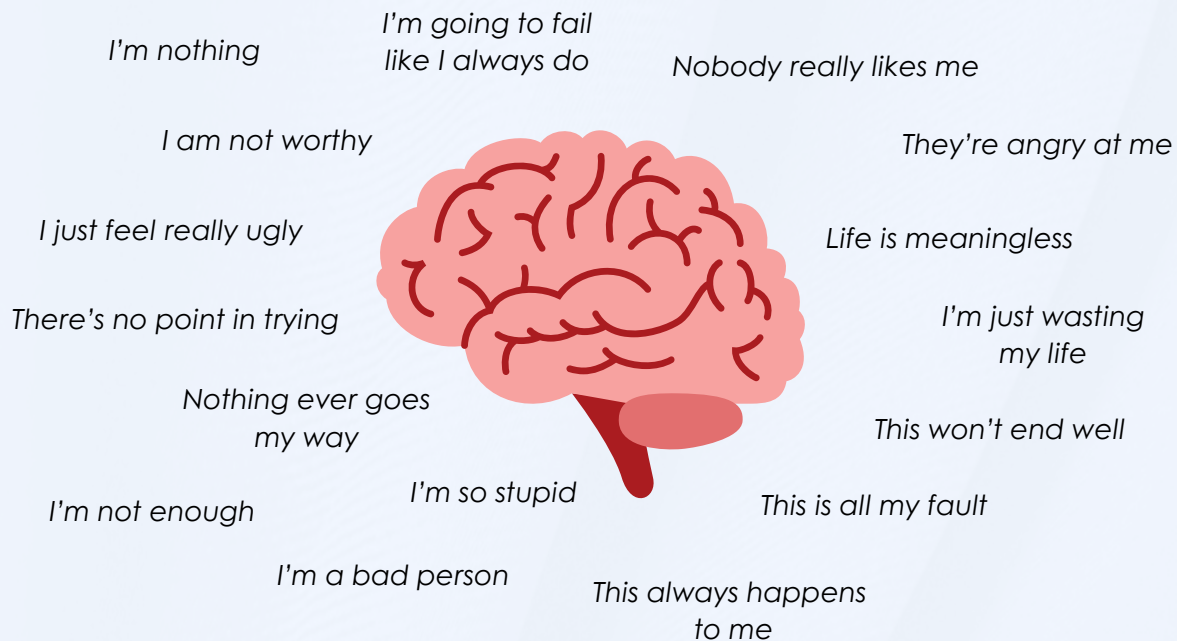
The good news is that ANTs can be fixed using strategies and practice. It is often advisable to seek help from a professional.

Some tools that have been beneficial in changing ANTs are:

1. The CBT cognitive triangle
2. Positive self-talk
3. Capturing ANTs and reframing the negative thoughts
4. Mindfulness exercises
5. Gratitude
6. Therapy

Many therapists use Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), a short-term talk therapy that helps to identify the connections between emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. CBT helps to identify ANTs and cognitive distortions. Once identified, these thoughts are examined, challenged, and dismantled. Negative distorted thoughts are replaced with accurate, reasonable thoughts. Changing thoughts leads to a shift in emotion and behavior.

AUTOMATIC NEGATIVE THOUGHTS




Resources:

American Psychological Association (2018). Retrieved from <https://dictionary.apa.org/automatic-thoughts>

Vallej, M. (2022). (ANTs): How to identify and fix them. Retrieved from <https://mentalhealthcenterkids.com/blogs/articles/automatic-negative-thoughts>.

School Avoidance Alliance (2023), Retrieved from: <https://schoolavoidance.org/school-avoidance-facts/>

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