# See the source imageIdentify and Challenge Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTS)

ANTs are thoughts that pop up automatically in the brain and cause unpleasant feelings. Common examples are :

'I'm not good enough'

'I’m not attractive'

'I am rubbish at … '

“Bad things always happen to me”

' Why did I.. ? '

“If only…”

“ What if .. ?”

Its not that our minds are trying to make us feel bad, it is, actually, our sub-conscious defensive systems looking for potential threats, to protect us. Sometimes, however, ANTS can go into overdrive and we need to keep a check on them.

The first step in controlling ANTS is to identify these thoughts. This can be hard at first because they pop up without us really being aware of them. A useful tool is to keep a diary or notebook and when you realise an ANT has popped up, note it down. Then, when you have 5 minutes (it doesn’t need to be longer than that), challenge your ANT with the following questions. Challenging ANTS is this way will break them down and reduce their occurrence.

How does this thought make you feel? (emotions/ body)

What does this thinking make you want to do?

What is the evidence for this thought being real?

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What is the evidence that this thought isn’t true?

What is the realistic likelihood of this becoming true?

Will continuing to think this thought make things better or make any difference?

Is this thought helping you?

What would you tell your best friend if they told you they had this thought?

What would be a more helpful and accurate way of thinking?

**The next time you notice this ANT, choose to focus on this new helpful thought.**

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