

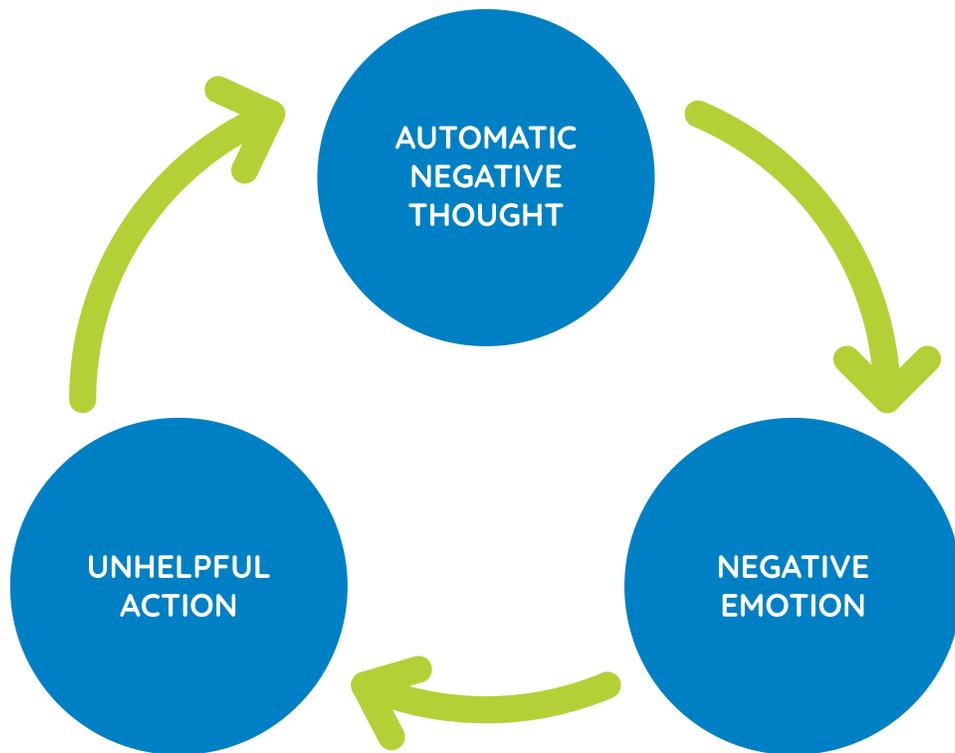


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Train Your Brain

It's perfectly human to experience a range of moods and emotions. Moods and emotions give us important information about how we're feeling and if we need to take action. However, they can take over in unhelpful ways that interfere with how we think, feel and act, and even impact how we function in our day-to-day lives. Sometimes we can do work on our own to turn things around. However, contacting a therapist or other mental health care professional may be required.

Automatic negative thoughts (ANTs) can affect our thinking, how we feel, and our behaviour. This worksheet will walk you through one way to get out of a negative thinking loop. With practice, these steps can help you learn important skills to help you master your mood and feel more positive.





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What is Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy?

Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is a widely used, clinically tested psychotherapy model. It can help us learn how everyday situations can trigger automatic negative thoughts, which, in turn, can impact how we feel and act. It can also help us challenge—and reframe—our negative thinking. While this worksheet borrows some of these techniques, it is not meant to replace cognitive-behavioural therapy.

Let's get out of the ANT Trap...

It's easy to get caught up in automatic negative thought traps—negative thoughts tend to be self-reinforcing and they can affect our emotions and our moods. They can also get us pretty worked up if we don't stop the cycle.

Think of a situation that negatively impacted your mood and write it down (maybe it's happening right now).

What is the first thought that popped into your head in this situation?

If your first thought was a negative one, you may have opened the door to a negative thought loop.

Did you notice what mood came with this thought? What was it?

Can you rate your mood on a scale of 1-10 (with 1 being very poor, and 10 being very positive)?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Here's a list of common automatic negative thought traps:

Labelling - using negative words like “loser”, “failure”, or “idiot” to describe yourself or others when things don't go as planned.

Polarized thinking - seeing things in extremes: thinking things or people are either all “good” or all “bad”, either perfect or terrible, without seeing the shades of grey.

Disqualifying the positive - discounting good things that have happened by attributing them to luck or an accident, rather than your own skills and abilities.

Catastrophizing - imagining the worst possible outcomes.

Mental filter - focusing on negative details while filtering out positive aspects of a situation.

Overgeneralizing - making broad statements or assumptions with only a single piece of evidence.

Jumping to conclusions - assuming that you know what's behind another person's thoughts, feelings or actions.

“Should” statements - putting undue pressure on yourself by thinking there are things you “should” have or “could” have done differently.

Emotional reasoning - assuming that the way you feel is necessarily true.

Personalization - believing that what others say or do reflects personally on you.

The first step to getting unstuck is to name the type of automatic negative thinking. Refer to the list above and name your negative thought according to one or more of these types.

My negative thought is an example of this type of automatic negative thinking:





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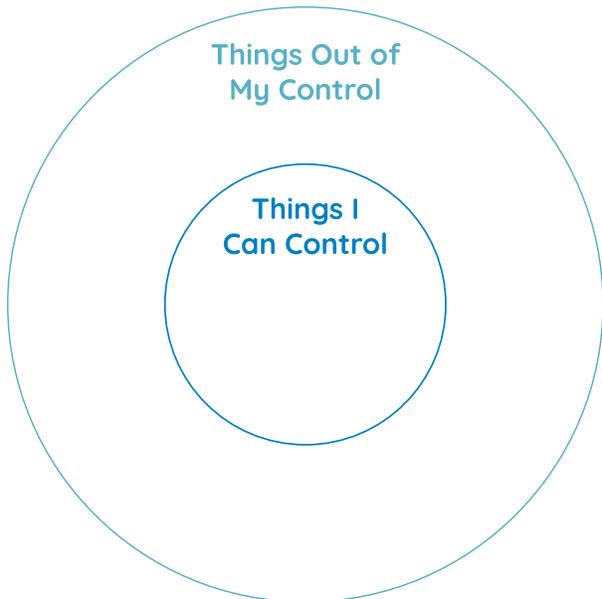
Now that you've named your automatic negative thought, take a step back and look at it objectively. By doing this, we avoid making assumptions that aren't based on fact, and ground ourselves in what we know to be true.

What is the evidence to support this thought?	What is an alternative thought? Is there evidence to support this thought?

Based on the evidence, what is a more balanced thought?

It can be hard to accept things as they are, and we tend to spend time and energy worrying about things we can't control.

Now, refer back to the situation you named above as having generated a negative thought. In this situation, what is within your control, and what is not?





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Sometimes a situation causes us to imagine the negative outcomes (even positive situations like getting a promotion or having a baby can have us anticipating everything that could go wrong). Often, these aren't accurate assessments of the likely outcomes.

Test your worst fears of what could happen—and weigh them against some good things that might result.

What are the worst things that could happen?	What are some good things that could happen?
E.g. I won't be able to keep up and I'll lose my job.	E.g. I'll learn something new that could help me move forward in my career.

When we are stuck in negative thinking, it can affect how we respond to situations—we tend to *react* rather than *respond* in a way that's informed by our emotional intelligence. Sometimes our reactions are positive and help us move forward; other times, we respond in ways that don't serve our longer-term goals.





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Take a moment to consider possible reactions and responses to the situation you named above.

What would be your typical reaction to a situation like this? (physical, emotional, behavioural)	What are other possible responses?
E.g. My heart starts to race, I feel panicked/scared, and I blurt out something overly defensive to a work colleague.	E.g. Excuse myself politely, take some time to calm down and then circle back with a response or further questions.
E.g. I can't concentrate and don't get all my work done, making the situation feel worse.	E.g. Reach out to a trusted colleague who can provide some insight and/or help me to stay on top of my to-do list.

What has happened in the past when you have had these responses?	What different outcomes could there be?

Now that you have taken a step back to name the automatic negative thought trap and have more objectively assessed what you're thinking, how you feel and what potential responses might be, you are likely no longer stuck in an automatic negative thought loop. Let's problem-solve!

Check in with yourself again...What are your thoughts about the original situation?





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Are there any next steps you feel you should take?

Now, how would you rate your mood on a scale of 1-10? Notice if your mood has improved.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Use this worksheet any time you're feeling stuck in an automatic negative thought trap, and refer back to it as you manage the situation you identified. By practicing these steps over a period of time you are likely to find that your skill in getting unstuck (or even your ability to not get stuck) improves.

This worksheet does not take the place of the important role a therapist can play in addressing a mental health problem or a mental illness. If you have been feeling down for a period of two weeks or longer, or if your mood is affecting your ability to function, you may want to consult a health care professional.

Learn more about working with emotions at notmyselftoday.ca/emotions

Additional Not Myself Today resources:

- Resource Sheet: *Train Your Brain to Master Your Mood*
- Activity: *Stop & Think*
- Videos: *Managing Your Moods, Emotional Intelligence*
- Webinars: *Managing Your Mood, Developing Emotional Intelligence*

References:

- Beck, A. T. (1976). *Cognitive Therapy and the Emotional Disorders* (4th ed.). Madison, CT: International University Press.
- Burns, D. (1981). *Feeling good: The new mood therapy*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.