

# AMEN CLINICS

## ANT Therapy

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### *Correcting the Automatic Negative Thoughts That Steal Your Happiness and Rob Your Joy*

One of the most effective techniques I give all my patients is what I call ANT Therapy, or learning how to kill the ANTs (automatic negative thoughts). I coined this term in the early '90s after a hard day at the office, during which I had several very difficult sessions that day with patients in crisis. When I got home that evening I found an ant infestation in my kitchen. It was gross. As I started to clean them up, the acronym came to me. I thought of my patients from that day—like my infested kitchen, my patients' brains were also infested by the negative thoughts that were robbing them of their joy and stealing their happiness.

The next day, I brought a can of ant spray to work as a visual aid and have been working diligently ever since to help my patients eradicate their ANTs.

**Here are the "ANT Killing" principles we use at Amen Clinics to help people feel better fast:**

- 1. Every time you have a thought, your brain releases chemicals.** That's how our brains work: you have a thought...your brain releases chemicals...an electrical transmission goes across your brain and you become aware of what you're thinking. Thoughts are real and they have a direct impact on how you feel and how you behave.
- 2. Every time you have a mad thought, an unkind thought, a sad thought, or a cranky thought, your brain releases negative chemicals that make your feel bad.** Think about the last time you were mad. How did you feel physically? When most people are mad, their muscles get tense, their heart beats faster, their hands start to sweat, and they may even begin to feel a little dizzy. Your body reacts to every negative thought you have.
- 3. Every time you have a good thought, a happy thought, a hopeful thought, or a kind thought your brain releases chemicals that make your body feel good.** Think about the last time you had a really happy thought. What did you feel inside your body? When most people are happy their muscles relax and their heartbeat and breathing slow down. Your body also reacts to your good thoughts.

**4. Thoughts are very powerful!** They can make your mind and body feel good or they can make you feel bad. Every cell in your body is affected by every thought you have. That is why when people get emotionally upset they often develop physical symptoms, such as headaches or stomachaches.

**5. Thoughts lie; they lie a lot, but it is your unquestioned or uninvestigated thoughts that make you sad, mad, nervous, or out of control.** Unfortunately, if you never challenge your thoughts, you always "believe them." The negative thoughts invade your mind like ants at a picnic. One negative thought, like one ant at a picnic, is not a big deal. Two or three negative thoughts, like two or three ants at a picnic, become more irritating. And ten or twenty negative thoughts can cause real problems.

**6. You can train your thoughts to be positive and hopeful or you can just allow them to be negative and upset you.** Once you learn about your thoughts, you can choose to think good thoughts and feel good, or you can choose to think bad thoughts and feel lousy. That's right, it's up to you. Research has shown that positive emotions—especially a sense of awe—can reduce inflammation (which hurts your health). You can learn how to change your thoughts and change the way you feel.

#### **Nine Different Types of ANTs (or ways we distort reality to make it worse than it really is)**

1. All or nothing thinking: thoughts that things are all good or all bad.
2. "Always" thinking: thinking in words like always, never, no one, everyone, every time, everything.
3. Focusing on the negative: only seeing the bad in a situation.
4. Fortune telling: predicting the worst possible outcome to a situation with little or no evidence for it.
5. Mind reading: believing you know what another person is thinking even though they haven't told you.
6. Thinking with your feelings: believing negative feelings without ever questioning them.
7. Guilt beatings: thinking in words like "should, must, ought, or have to."
8. Labeling: attaching a negative label to yourself or someone else.
9. Blame: blaming someone else for the problems you have. **(RED ANT)**

## **ANT Killing Exercise:**

Whenever you feel sad, mad, nervous, or out of control, write down your automatic negative thoughts, label them, then “kill” them by talking back to them.

Here are some ANT Killing examples:

<b><u>ANT</u></b>	<b><u>Species of ANT</u></b>	<b><u>Kill the ANT</u></b>
My wife never listens to me.	Always Thinking	That's just not true. She often listens to me. Today she is just distracted.
My boss doesn't like me.	Mind Reading	I don't know that for sure. Maybe she's just having a bad day. I need to talk to her.
I'm a failure.	Labeling	Sometimes I fail, but many times I succeed
It's my husband's fault.	Blame	I will look at my part of the problem and look for ways to make it better.

Your thoughts matter. Learn to kill the ANTs and train your thoughts to be positive—it will benefit your mind, mood, and body.

Make copies of the worksheet on the following page and use it to help you get control of your automatic negative thoughts.

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## Kill the ANTs Worksheet:

When you notice an ANT:

1. Write it down.
2. Identify the type of ANT it is.
3. Kill the ANT by talking back to it – challenge the thought!

**What's your ANT?**

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**What type of ANT is it?**

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**Kill the ANT by talking back to it:**

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**What's your ANT?**

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**What type of ANT is it?**

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**Kill the ANT by talking back to it:**

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