

Positive Thoughts = Positive Feelings

Summary

This lesson will teach students how to identify and redirect negative thoughts and establish "positive self-talk" skills.

Main Core Tie

Health Education I (7-8)

[Strand 1: HEALTH FOUNDATIONS AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS OF HEALTHY SELF \(HF\) Standard HI.HF.3:](#)

Materials

Worksheets: ["Identifying and Squashing Automatic Negative Thoughts--'A.N.Ts'"](#) and ["What Kind of A.N.Ts Are Ruining Your Life-picnic?"](#)

Intended Learning Outcomes

- Identify and redirect negative thoughts.
- Establish "positive self-talk" skills.

Instructional Procedures

Lesson at a Glance

- Review how the brain functions and thoughts are generated (Lessons How Alcohol Damages a Teen's Developing Brain [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#))
- Introduce concepts of "mind dump," "A.N.Ts,"
- Discuss typical A.N.Ts which disrupt the lives of teens.
- Discuss ideas of how to squash A.N.Ts and live a more successful happy life.
- Complete worksheet "Identifying and Squashing Automatic Negative Thoughts-- A.N.Ts" and homework sheet "What Kind of A.N.Ts Are Ruining Your Life- picnic?"

New Vocabulary

A.N.Ts

Introduction (Setting Focus)

Review the brain development and physiology of Prevention Dimensions How Alcohol Damages a Teen's Developing Brain [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#).

How does the brain generate and transmit energy?

How much awareness do people have of the thought process?

With 110-150 billion neurons sending thought energy around the brain, what are possibilities of meaningless or random thoughts?

Discuss the following ideas:

The brain is much like a computer that is always on.

It never goes to sleep.

At night, our brain processes and stores all the things we heard or experienced during the day. Even negative experiences that are hurtful and not wanted are stored somewhere in our subconscious mind.

Scientists are studying more about how the brain stores and retrieves thoughts but for this lesson today we will call our thought storage bin the "mind-dump." All thoughts, both positive and negative, are stored in our "mind-dump."

Even false messages are stored and processed. Untrue statements like "I'm stupid," "I'm not good enough," or "Nobody likes me" are carefully sent to the mind dump.

Most of these messages are not true, and they are definitely not useful. These negative

messages are like bits of garbage collected and thrown in a dump.

Compare a community garbage dump to the brain's mind dump using the following prompts:

How are the smells of a garbage dump that drift into our noses like the negative thoughts that drift into our conscious mind?

Because these negative thoughts seem to come from nowhere, some psychiatrists (like Dr. David Burns, Adjunct Clinical Associate Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the Stanford University School of Medicine, call them "phantom thoughts."

Dr. Daniel Amen of the Amen Clinics calls these random bits of thought "Automatic Negative Thoughts or A.N.Ts."

These thoughts are usually inaccurate, and often lie to us, but at first glance they may seem believable.

The more a person thinks about these garbage type A.N.Ts, the more neural connections are made solidifying the thoughts (myelination of the connections) or, in other words, building "ANT hills."

Just as a few ants won't ruin a picnic but a whole swarm of them create misery. How constantly believing mental A.N.Ts ruin life's picnic?

How could learning to manage A.N.Ts help people have a more happy, successful and productive life?

Body (Strategies/Activities)

Expand student understanding of the mind-body-chemical connection using the following prompts:

When brain activity and thoughts occur, various electrical- chemical energy is released.

The body responds to this brain energy by releasing additional chemicals into the system.

The body responds to every thought. In other words, the body speaks the mind.

Lie detectors work by measuring tiny changes in the body's electrical-chemical energy.

Positive, kind, happy thoughts produce chemicals (dopamines and endorphins) which make you feel happy or good.

Negative, angry, mean, or unhappy thoughts produces chemicals (cortasoids and andrenals) which make you feel sad, angry, or depressed.

Ants at My Picnic activity

The class divides into two teams and chooses a scribe to record answers.

Each team brainstorms answers the question, "What are five negative thoughts teens sometimes have?"

Each team scribe lists their team's responses on different sides of the board.

Teams look at the opposing team's list of negative thoughts and takes turns trying to discredit each item on the other team's list. (The teacher moderates this part of game by asking, "How is this negative thought really inaccurate or illogical?")

Teams get a point each time they prove a negative thought is not accurate. The team with the most points wins.

Tell the following story.

"It was summer and Shelley, age 17, was tending her neighbor's three children for a week while the parents went out of town. She had tended them before--but not overnight, and since they had offered her a lot of money, she decided to take the job. It was much harder than she thought. The two year old kept her awake all the night, and trying to keep three kids happy, fed, and entertained 24 hours a day was wearing her out. By the third day, she was exhausted and couldn't wait for the parents to get home. She had just settled one fight, got them playing nicely, and went into the kitchen to wash dishes when she heard a fight break out behind her. "I can't stand this any more!" she thought. "These kids are driving me crazy. If I have to spend one more minute here, I will go bonkers. Why did I ever take this job?" Telling the children to be nice, she

hurried to finish the dishes--her negative thoughts growing worse and worse. She started to feel emotionally fragile and sort of trembly. Then all of a sudden, she realized what was happening, and said aloud, "What am I doing to myself?" She immediately stopped her negative self-talk and said in a resolute voice, "I can do this! I am strong and capable, and I can do this!" She repeated, "I can do this!" a few more times and was amazed at the positive difference she felt. She wiped her hands, quieted the children, and got them involved in a fun project. Then whenever things got difficult, she remembered to say, "I can do this!" She finished her week of baby-sitting tired but mentally strong and upbeat. She later reported that she would never again "sand-bag" herself down with negative thoughts.

How did the negative thoughts affect the girl in the story?

What did she do about it? Then how did she feel?

What are some personal experiences that are similar to those in this story?

Conduct the following activity or a similar one to demonstrate the power of positive thinking over negative thinking.

Tell students to think of something challenging or hard that they have to do. Now, with that thought in their head, say aloud several times (with enthusiasm) "I can do this!"

Ask them, "How did saying a positive statement make you feel?"

Doctors have categorized negative thoughts into ten different types. We can get rid of negative thoughts or A.N.Ts by using a two-part process:

First we identify what type or species it is, and then

We squash it by telling it the truth.

Complete the worksheet "Identifying and Squashing Automatic Negative Thoughts--"A.N.Ts".

Discuss the ten different A.N.Ts. types or "species" listed on the top of the handout.

Divide the class into pairs and have students decide which "species" describes each of the negative "A.N.Ts. statements on the handout.

Students fill in the "species" blanks on their individual worksheets.

As a class, brainstorm accurate things students could say to "squash" each "ANT,"

allowing time for students to fill in their worksheets. (For ideas, see the answer guide.)

Discuss other ways people can use to replace negative thoughts. (e.g., sing a song; repeat a line from a poem, scripture, or inspirational thought; think of something funny; laugh at how silly the thought is, etc.)

NOTE: Some negative thoughts are caused by painful or harmful experiences and may need to be resolved through talking about it with a counselor or trusted adult before the thought can successfully be confined to the "mind-dump." Other times, negative thoughts occur because the person has done something wrong. In that case, an apology needs to happen, the harm made up and then the thought can be confined, dumped or squashed.

Closure (Wrap-Up and Extension)

Discuss how the mind can be trained to concentrate and accept thoughts that are hopeful and positive.

Each person has the power to squash the negative A.N.Ts by telling the truth about the thought, believing our own ability and value, telling the thought to leave our minds and refusing to think about the A.N.Ts.

With training and practice, negative thoughts will seldom drift out of our subconscious "mind- dump" and hinder us and we will feel a lot happier.

Complete the homework assignment "What Kind of A.N.Ts Are Ruining Your Life-Picnic?"

*The A.N.Ts concept comes from Dr. Daniel Amen, psychiatrist and neuroscientist of the Amen Clinics, Newport Beach and Fairfield, California. See his website at www.brainplace.com for more information.

Extensions

Additional Materials

Mind Coach--How to Teach Kids and Teenagers to Think Positive and Feel Good, by Dr. Daniel Amen, M.D., Psychiatrist, the Amen Clinics, Newport Beach and Fairfield, California (ISBN 1--886554--07--2)

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