

Cracking the NUTS and Eliminating the ANTS

THEORY

Psychologists Elisha Goldstein, Aaron Beck and David Burns use catchy acronyms to help clients uncover and eliminate their unhealthy thoughts. Their “user-friendly” techniques offer visualizations to help clients become more mindful of their unhealthy thinking patterns.

In his book *Uncovering Happiness*, Goldstein uses the image of NUTS to refer to **N**egative **U**nconscious **T**hought**S**. He suggests that by **being mindful of those intrusive thoughts, and by bringing them into awareness**, we can stop driving ourselves “NUTS.” He found using this acronym injects some humor with his clients, who get a laugh out of the NUTS that are making them NUTS!

Beck used the acronym ANTS to refer to the **A**utomatic **N**egative **T**hought**S** that result in anxiety and depression, leading to low self esteem and self doubt. Burns popularized this acronym in his book, *Feeling Good*. NUTS and ANTS sabotage self-esteem and happiness, and are characterized by the cognitive errors highlighted earlier in this chapter, such as all or nothing thinking, jumping to conclusions, emotional reasoning and labeling.

IMPLEMENTATION

Offer group members a mini-lesson on the concept behind these two acronyms: NUTS and ANTS. The acronyms are essentially interchangeable for representing habitual self-sabotaging thought habits.

After introducing the concepts, here are some ways to incorporate in the group. Use the following activity to help members *crack* the NUTS and *eliminate* the ANTS!

Name – the NUTS and ANTS - Have group members write down 5 phrases that put words to the NUTS and ANTS, such as “*I’m no good*,” “*I’ll never find someone to love*,” “*There’s something wrong with me*,” “*I’m unlikeable*.” After naming the NUTS, reflect on the general themes that tie them together.

Crack – the NUTS and step on the ANTS - Have group members ask themselves how certain they are of the truth of these NUTS and ANTS. Have them challenge the truth of their self-sabotaging statements. Where’s the evidence? What are more factual ways to reframe them?

Count – the NUTS and ANTS - Give group members a few minutes to identify the NUTS and ANTS that go through their head, or write them down, and count how many they identify in a certain period of time.

PROCESSING

Using these two visual acronyms adds humor into the group while helping tackle irrational thought habits by cracking the NUTS and stepping on the ANTS! Identifying ANTS and NUTS can be an effective homework assignment to bring in for processing at the next group. How many were they able to identify in the past week? Did they count them? How many NUTS did they crack? How many ANTS did they step on?



Stop Going NUTS!

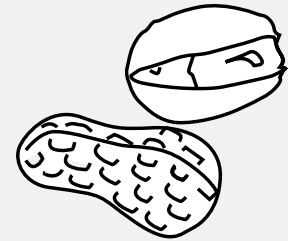
Learning to identify negative unhealthy thoughts will help you stop going NUTS or buggy!

Psychologist Elisha Goldstein uses the acronym **NUTS** to refer to our **N**egative **U**nconscious **T**hought**S**. Psychologists Aaron Beck and David Burns refer to those disturbing self-sabotaging thoughts as **ANTS** - **A**utomatic **N**egative **T**hought**S**. They both use different images for the same problem we experience when we think in self-sabotaging ways -- which rob us of self-esteem and happiness.

Name your top 5 NUTS:

Example: "I'm unlikeable"

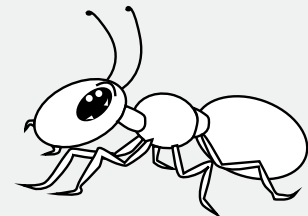
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____



What ANTS do you want to eliminate?

Example: "No one will ever love me."

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____



What are some cognitive errors what make you nutty and drive you buggy?

Example: All or nothing thinking

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____