

Challenge negative thoughts

YOU CAN CHANGE THE WAY YOU THINK AND BEGIN THINKING POSITIVE
SAYS **MEERA RAVI**



When a student's mind is clouded with extreme anxiety, it may give rise to negative thinking. It is common to find oneself indulging in negative self talk. The more a person worries about exams and the more that worry is rooted in negative thoughts, the stronger the anxiety experience will be.

How do you change the negative thought that comes to you without your permission? Yes, it is very hard to say 'no' to such thoughts but here are a guidelines to help you do so. The Four R's are key words that summarize a Negative Thought Stopping procedure that can help you achieve this goal. Each word sets up the thought process for the next step in this sequential procedure.

RECOGNIZE - Recognizing that you are having a negative thought is a critical first step in learning to control negative thoughts. You must be "on guard" to recognize the first signs of negative thinking in order to crush that thought before it has a chance to fully form and strongly take hold of your conscious mind.

REFUSE - You must refuse to allow the negative thought to continue and gain strength by some positive and defined action (e.g. visualize a STOP sign in your mind's eye or silently yell STOP in your mind). You must do something to disrupt the negative image and thought in order to prevent it from growing stronger. By doing this, you begin the process of shifting your mind away from the negative thought.

RELAX - Use any of a number of

techniques that can help you to relax: take a deep, controlled breath; use a verbal trigger to shift your thoughts and feelings to a relaxing image etc. When you are relaxed, the effect of mental programming is more powerful.

REPLACE - The last step in the Negative Thought Stopping procedure serves to complete a mental shift toward images. You may replace the negative thought with a positive one.

Every emotion is associated with a corresponding thought. If you say I feel sad, there should be an associated thought behind this feeling. It is easy to find the associated thought by completing the statement: 'I feel sad because I think...'. The completed statement might be: 'I feel sad because I think I don't have friends'. What is the catch? The completed statement indicates your thought is causing the distress. When you think that you have no friends, whether it is a fact or not, you feel sad. This implies that changing the thought should help one to feel differently.

Similarly when you feel tense, try and find out what the corresponding thought might be. For example, "I am feeling scared because..."

NEGATIVE THOUGHT - "I am definitely going to fail." Resulting feelings: fear, anxiety, helplessness

POSITIVE THOUGHT - "I am well prepared and there is no chance of me failing." Resulting feelings: calm and hopeful

NEGATIVE THOUGHT - "However much

I study I always go blank in the examination hall." Resulting feeling: anxiety and fear

POSITIVE THOUGHT - "Even if I go blank for a few minutes I will bring myself back with my will power. It is in my hands not to let this affect me." Resulting feeling: self assured and encouraged

If you give attention to negative thoughts, they will get stronger and stronger. Try to break the vicious cycle by shifting your focus to something positive.

- Realize that you only harm yourself with negative thoughts. Don't let them trick you.
- Decide that you will live your day with pleasure and not let negative thoughts steal it.
- Look at yourself in the mirror and say, "I'm a positive person. I won't let negative thoughts control me. I'm a winner in life."
- Change the tone of your thoughts from negative to positive. If you think negatively about someone, remember positive things about that person. Shift your attention to the positive side.
- Smile. It's more difficult to think negatively when you are smiling.
- Walk and act confidently. Good body language helps you have good thoughts.
- Have realistic expectations. Accept the fact that people could make mistakes since nobody is perfect.
- Accept yourself and be comfortable with who you are. You can't be perfect but neither can anyone else.

(Meera Ravi is a psychologist and author with many years of experience in dealing with student queries about handling studies)