Becoming Your Authentic Self

Pure Joy, Pure Love, Pure Happiness

01 - Why Am I Always Stuck

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Overview of Brain Functions and Problems

Outside View of the Brain

Prefrontal Cortex

Functions	Problems
Attention	Inattention
Judgment	Poor judgment
Planning	Lack of forethought
Impulse control	Impulsive
Follow through	Procrastination
Empathy	Lack of empathy

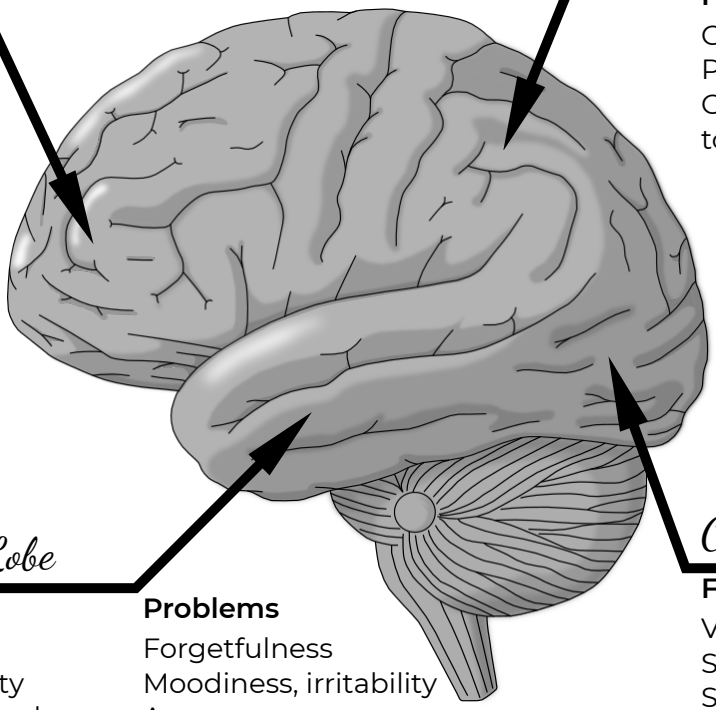
Parietal Lobe

Functions

Direction sense
Reading maps
Sense of touch
Sees objects in space (catches a ball)

Problems

Gets lost easily
Poor map reading
Oversensitive to light, touch, or sound



Temporal Lobe

Functions	Problems
Memory	Forgetfulness
Mood stability	Moodiness, irritability
Temper control	Anger
Language	Trouble finding words
Listening	Processing problems
Reading	Poor reading
Read social cues	Poor social skills
Rhythm, music	Rhythm problems
Spiritual experience	Unusual experience

Occipital Lobe

Functions

Vision
Seeing in 3D
Sees color
Sees lines

Problems

Vision problems
Visual distortions
Color blindness
Visual hallucinations

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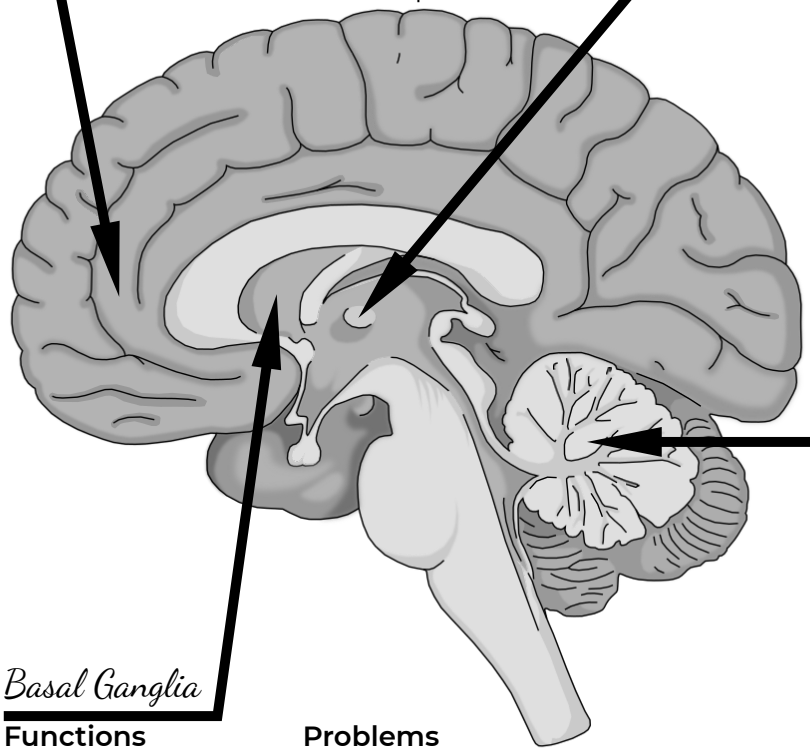
Inside View of the Brain

Anterior Cingulate Gyrus

Functions
Gear shifter
Flexibility
Cooperation
Go with the flow
See options
Error correction

Problems
Gets stuck, worries
Rigid
Argumentative
Oppositional
Addictions
Obsessions or compulsions



Deep Limbic System

Functions
Mood control
Motivation
Attitude
Appetite/sleep
Bonding
Sense of smell
Libido

Problems
Depression
Poor motivation
Poor attitude
Sleep/appetite issues
Tends to isolate
Lack of smell
Negativity, guilt
Hopelessness

Cerebellum

Functions
Coordination
Motor control
Posture
Organization
Judgment
Speed of thought

Problems
Poor coordination
Poor motor control
Unstable posture
Disorganization
Poor judgment
Slow thinking, slow speech, and slow walk

Basal Ganglia

Functions
Sense of calm
Sets anxiety level
Movement
Mediates pleasure

Problems
Tension, nervousness
Anxiety/panic
Tremors/tics
Conflict avoidance
Predicting the worst

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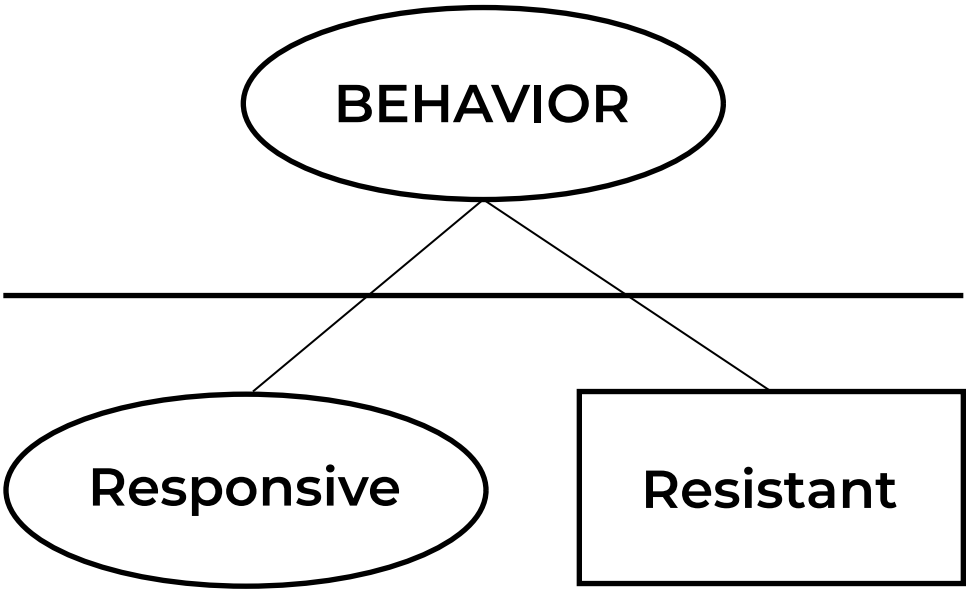
Two Ways of Being

Way of Being Diagram

Above the Surface:

What I might be doing, saying



How I am seeing others

Below the Surface:

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Amen Clinics ANT Therapy

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

You don't have to believe every stupid thought you have.

"I have no control over my eating...drinking...smoking."

"I only smoke pot because you make me so miserable."

"My dad was an alcoholic so I'm destined to be one, too."

"I only bet on sports with my friends, so I don't have a gambling problem."

"I am so awful, no one will love or forgive me."

"I smoke just so I can spend time with other smokers I like."

"My mother smoked and ate poorly and lived well into her nineties. I have great genes."

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.

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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 ANTs That Keep You in Chains

Over the years therapists have identified nine "species" of ANTs or types of negative thoughts that can increase your risk for relapse:

1	**All or nothing**	Thinking things are all good or all bad.
2	**Always thinking**	Overgeneralizing one bad event to think it will always happen. 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	**Thinking with your feelings**	Believing every feeling you have. Believing negative feelings without ever questioning them.
5	**Guilt beating**	Using guilt to try to motivate behavior. Thinking in words like "should, must, ought, or have to."
6	**Labeling**	Attaching a negative label to yourself or someone else.
7	**Fortune telling**	Predicting the worst
8	**Mind reading**	Reading other people's minds. Believing you know what another person is thinking even though they haven't told you.
9	**Blame and denial**	Blaming someone else for the problems you have.

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Develop an Internal ANTeater to Challenge Your Erroneous Thoughts

You do not have to believe every stupid thought that goes through your brain. Develop an internal ANTeater that can kill all the negative thoughts that come into your head and mess up your life. Teach your ANTeater to talk back to the ANTs so you can free yourself from negative thinking patterns.

Whenever you feel sad, mad, nervous, obsessive, or out of control, write down the automatic thoughts that are going through your mind. The act of writing them down helps to get them out of your head. Identify the ANT species then talk back to them. Challenging negative thoughts takes away their power and gives you control over your thoughts, moods, and behaviors.

ANT-Killing Examples

ANT	Species of ANT	Kill the ANT
You never listen to me.	Always thinking	I get frustrated when you don't listen to me but I know you have listened to me and will again.
I'll pass out if I have to speak at my support group.	Fortune telling	I don't know that. Odds are I will do fine.
I'm unlovable.	Labeling	Sometimes I do things that push others away, but I also do many loving things.
It's your fault I have these problems.	Blame and denial	I need to look at my part of the problems and look for ways I can make the situation better.
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.

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 and 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	Species of ANT	Kill the ANT by talking back to it

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Do the Work

The Work, developed by Byron Katie, is simple yet very powerful. It consists of writing down any bothersome, worrisome, or negative thoughts, then asking ourselves four questions, and then doing a turnaround. The goal of the Work isn't pie-in-the-sky positive thinking; it is honest thinking. The four questions are:

1. Is it true? (Is the negative thought true?)
2. Can I absolutely know that it is true?
3. How do I react when I think that thought?
4. Who would I be without the thought? Or how would I feel if I didn't have the thought?

After you answer the four questions, you take your original thought and turn it around to its opposite, and ask yourself whether the opposite of the original thought is true. Then, turn the original thought around and apply it to yourself [how does the opposite of the thought apply to me personally?]. Then, turn the thought around to the other person if the thought involves another person [how does the opposite apply to the other person?].

Here is an example of how to use the four questions to kill the ANTs that are keeping you in chains. Corinne, fifty-two, had smoked since she was a teenager. She had now smoked for almost forty years and had wrinkled skin and trouble breathing. The people who loved her wanted her to stop. She wanted to stop but didn't believe she could without serious pain. "I cannot stop," she told me. Here is how she worked on that thought.

Negative Thought: "I cannot stop smoking"

Question #1: Is it true that you cannot stop smoking?

"Yes," she said.

Question #2: Can you absolutely know that it is true that you cannot stop smoking?

Initially she said yes, she knew she couldn't do it. Then she thought about it and said, "Of course, I cannot know for sure, especially if I got the right help."

Question #3: How do you feel when you have the thought "I cannot stop smoking."

"I feel powerless, sad, weak-willed, stupid, out of control, like a bad influence on my children."

Question #4: Who would you be without the thought "I cannot stop smoking."

She thought about it for a moment then said, "Hopeful, optimistic, more likely to give it my best effort."

Turnaround: What is the opposite thought of "I cannot stop smoking." Is it true or truer than the original thought?

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Corinne said the opposite thought is "I can stop smoking." She thought about this for a while and said that if she got help and really tried, it could be true. Then she felt a sense of control and committed to the program. Your thoughts are either helping you or hurting you.

Practice the Work

Negative Thought _____

Question #1: Is it true that you cannot stop [ ]? _____

Question #2: Can you absolutely know that it is true that you cannot [ ]? _____

Question #3: How do you feel when you have the thought [ ]? _____

Question #4: Who would you be without the thought [ ]? _____

Turnaround: What is the opposite thought of [ ]? _____

Is it true or truer than the original thought?

☐ **Yes** explain: _____

☐ **No** explain: _____

Unchain Your Brain Checklist

- Stop lying to yourself.
- Don't believe every stupid thought that goes through your brain.
- Become familiar with the nine ANTs that steal your happiness and keep you in chains.
- Develop an internal ANTeater that can talk back to your negative thoughts.
- Do The Work to challenge and eliminate negative, addiction-causing thoughts.

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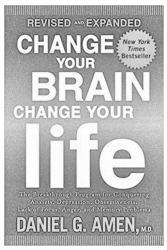
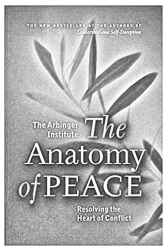
Additional Resources

If you would like to learn more about brain health, pick up a copy of Dr. Daniel G. Amen's book. If you would like to learn healthy ways to view yourself and those around you, I recommend *The Anatomy of Peace*. If you have medical concerns and would like to work with me, reach out and setup an appointment. My staff and I enjoy helping people reclaim their lives with through health.

Additional Reading



Change Your Brain, Change Your Life (Revised and Expanded): *The Breakthrough Program for Conquering Anxiety, Depression, Obsessiveness, Lack of Focus, Anger, and Memory Problems* by Daniel G. Amen M.D. | 2015



The Anatomy of Peace: *Resolving the Heart of Conflict* by The Arbinger Institute | 2006

Reach out to Dr. Jennifer Burns, NMD

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I created *Burns Integrative Wellness Center* so I would have greater freedom in helping patients like you. I stay current with medical research and combine leading treatments with decades of medical experience. Give us a call. My staff and I look forward to helping you with *Becoming Your Authentic Self*.

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