



HELPING YOUR TEEN OVERCOME NEGATIVE THINKING

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS

Teaching your teen to notice their negative thoughts and challenge them is a wonderful gift that will last a lifetime.

speakingofteens.com/27
(a companion download to episode #27
of the Speaking of Teens podcast)

Ann Coleman, JD
Parent Educator and Host, Speaking of Teens Podcast

HELPING YOUR TEEN OVERCOME NEGATIVE THINKING

It's incredible how much our thoughts impact our emotions and behavior. And with teens, their thoughts are negative more often than not. These thoughts lead to a lot of negative emotions and behaviors that can be avoided. You're in a really good position to help them overcome their negative thinking and I certainly hope this Guide helps you do that.

Ann Coleman

Disclaimer: I am not a mental healthcare provider and nothing I say in this Guide should be taken as advice regarding your child's mental health. I have researched and interpreted the information contained in this Guide from various credible resources including scientific journal articles. Please consult your child's pediatrician or mental healthcare provider if you suspect they may have an emotional or mental health issue or disorder. If they display signs that they may want to harm themselves, please call 988 for assistance or 911 for an imminent threat.

Speaking
of
Teens



ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Your teen or tween is going through a lot right now. The changes going on in their brain cause a lot of emotional chaos and risky behavior. They're singularly focused on fitting in and being accepted by their peers. They're extremely self-conscious and embarrassed by almost everything. And when you throw in social media and academic pressures or learning challenges, it can be almost too much for many kids to handle.

It's no surprise that adolescents are more likely than kids and adults to succumb to negative thinking or automatic negative thoughts. Those negative thoughts cause emotions and behaviors that if left unchecked can lead to anxiety disorders and even depression.

Helping them learn to spot their own negative thinking and identify the types of thinking traps they've fallen into are the initial steps in changing these thinking patterns. As discussed in the podcast, there are several interventions that can help them become more positive. Here, I'll review the common thinking traps, how to challenge these negative thoughts and reframe them more realistically.

A young man with short dark hair is sitting on a light-colored bench outdoors. He is wearing a blue and white striped shirt and blue jeans. He has a thoughtful or slightly distressed expression, with his right hand resting on his forehead. The background is a bright, slightly out-of-focus outdoor setting.

Common Thinking Traps

Our brain has an uncanny ability to manipulate incoming information and distort the way we think about it. And when our thinking is distorted it results in an emotional experience and response that are also distorted, out of proportion or mis-matched to the situation. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to these "cognitive distortions", which are usually negative. These distortions are often referred to as negative self-talk, automatic negative thoughts, or thinking traps (or, as I refer to them, "mind monsters").

Jumping to Conclusions

This is when we assume a negative conclusion without any real facts or evidence to back it up. We jump to conclusions in a couple of specific ways – either by *fortune telling* or *mind reading*. Fortune telling is when we jump to the conclusion that something in the future is going to turn out bad. Mind reading is when we assume we know what the other person is thinking, which is always something bad about us.

"There's no way I'm going to pass that test next week."

"Thomas isn't going to ask me to the prom, I just know it."

Overgeneralization

It's when we take one negative thing and turn it into a universal truth. We use one mistake, defeat, or negative event and turn it into an ongoing failure.

"I didn't make a single basket all game. I suck at team sports."

"I actually stuttered when I talked to her. I just can't talk to girls."

"I'll never be a teacher. I can't even teach my brother his spelling words."



Catastrophizing

This is when we either expect the worst thing to happen or we believe something is worse than it actually is. It could be a current situation or even something happening in the future. You could call it "making a mountain out of a mole hill" or "blowing things out of proportion."



"I'll never be able to snowboard again now that I've broken my knee!"

"I'm sure I failed that test. I'm never going to get into a good college."

"No one will ever speak to me again after I acted so stupid."

Labeling or Mislabeling

This is when we take one negative quality about ourselves and turn it into our label – our identity. It's an extreme version of overgeneralization - we define ourselves with this descriptor of our one big fault.

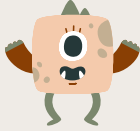
"I failed that simple test. I'm totally stupid."

"I'm so unathletic. I'm literally always the last one around the track."



Shoulds or Should Nots

This is when we think, "I should be able to do this" or "I shouldn't have to do that" or "I must do it this way." or "I can't do it that way."



"I shouldn't have to study for an hour for a quiz."

"I should be able to run circles around that kid."

"I must be in the top 5% of the class by the end of the year"



Personalization

This is when we blame ourselves for whatever goes wrong if it happens in our vicinity - even if it's totally out of our control. If it happens near us, it's our fault.

"They didn't like the pizza place. I feel horrible for suggesting we go there."

"Dad's seems angry. It must be because I forgot to take out the garbage."

Mental Filter



This is when we filter through all the positive things and concentrate only on the negative. It's like have blinders on for all the good that happens around us.

"Yes I made 5 As but I got a stupid B in Algebra and ruined everything."

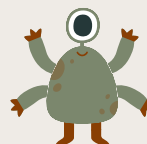
"Yes, I got into all 10 colleges I applied to but I didn't get into is the one I really wanted to and that's all that matters!"

Black or White/All or Nothing

When we see things, events, people, or ourselves only as either good or bad, right or wrong, perfect or horrible, all or nothing, etc. There is no in between or just right. Anything less than 100% = 0%.

*You made one misstep in the routine and think,
"That was a total flop!"*

The icing for the cake is a bit runny and you think, "I should just throw the cake in the garbage it's such a disaster."



Challenging Negative Thoughts

Helping them learn to spot their “mind monsters” is a great first step. Next you can help them challenge those thoughts.

If you can model this with your own negative thoughts, in front of your kids, it’s even better! You can also offer your help when you see them engaging in negative thinking (just remember to use emotion coaching as well).

For example:

Ask them to give you the proof that this negative thought is true (“prove everyone will laugh” or “prove that you’re stupid.”)

Ask them if they would say the same thing to their best friend if they were in their position (or if they think their best friend would say the same thing to them).

Ask them to think about what’s the worst thing that can possibly happen.

Urge them to consider a more reasonable or neutral explanation for what’s going on.

Again, just always remember to listen and acknowledge their feelings before walking them through these “challenges”.

Reframing Negative Thoughts

Once you've challenged the negative thought, you can move on to reframe them from a different perspective. Modeling this type of behavior is really important. It's not easy to do this as an adult but it's really difficult for an adolescent. Helping them learn to look at the situation through a more realistic lens is invaluable. You don't have to turn the negative into a "positive", you just need to help them see things more *factually*.



Hey there!

I'm Ann Coleman and struggled parenting my son during his teen years. After turning things around, I continued studying the science of adolescence and of parenting adolescents. I made the switch from attorney to parent educator and podcaster to help you avoid the mistakes I made.

If you enjoyed this Guide, you may be interested in the Speaking of Teens **PARENT CAMP** to help you strengthen the relationship with your teen, decrease the conflict and improve their behavior. Check out the **PARENT CAMP** membership and learn about the course, the weekly meetups with me, the monthly expert Q & As with subject matter experts who cover everything from drug use to self-harm, and the community forum, weekly challenges, and more.

Ann Coleman



Speaking *of* Teens



the podcast can be found on any podcast app like [Apple](#), [Spotify](#), [Amazon](#), etc. or on the website at SpeakingofTeens.com/podcast

