

Changing Your Negative Thinking with the “Add a But” Technique

Objective

To reduce habitual negative thinking by also considering the positive side of an argument.

You Should Know

Are you always seeing just the negative side of things? When you hear about something good do you find yourself immediately seeing the negative side of things, saying “Yes, but...” to discount or invalidate the positive thing you just heard.

Consider Jim. He finds himself spending a lot of time watching the news. He is angry and depressed much of the time, and even when someone points out something good happening in the world, he has a rebuttal. He will say, “Yes, but look at what’s happening with the economy!” Or, “Yes, but good things never last.” Instead of considering the positive in situations, Jim habitually focuses on the negative.

One way you can develop a more positive outlook is by using the Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) tool “add a but” (Beck, 2005). Using this tool, your “negative but” is followed by a “positive but.” The “positive but” will help you:

- prevent always seeing the worst-case scenario
- become more solution-focused, rather than just dwelling on problems
- shift your habit of believing the worst about people or situations
- get out of rigid thinking or feeling you have to always prove your point of view

What to Do

The first step is becoming aware of negative or discounting “buts” when you are presented with a positive situation or information. In the following chart, write down a positive statement, event, or situation and your automatic or habitual negative response or thought. Then, add a positive “but” to counter the negative “but.” Fill in the chart for two weeks.

Reflections on This Exercise

What are the most common situations that trigger your negative thinking?

How difficult was it to see the positive side of a situation? How did you manage to do this?

After you completed this exercise do you feel that you are more positive? What difference does this make in your life?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
