

SESSION

04

**SORT It**

READ THE LIGHTS  
& MIND YOUR  
GNATS



Youth Work Ireland  
Cork

# READ THE LIGHTS & MIND YOUR GNATS

Please ensure you have read the notes and have a thorough understanding of the traffic lights concept and the Negative Automated Thoughts approach.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this session participants will:

- ▷ Understand how to identify what they want from any given situation
- ▷ Be able to assess and rate challenges – using green, orange or red to denote whether the challenge is something they have to accept, something that requires negotiation or an issue that they have significant control over
- ▷ Identify challenges to their own goals and lives
- ▷ Understand the role of Negative Automated Thoughts in preventing us from handling situations well.



## SESSION TIMETABLE

Section	Time
Trickle In	10
Welcome	5
1. Read the lights	40
2. gNATS	35
Close	10

## MATERIALS NEEDED

- SORT It Module 4 PowerPoint presentation
- Flip charts in three areas of the room marked 'green' 'orange' and 'red'
- Computer, projector and screen
- Speakers connected to the computer to hear the video
- Copies of 'Hand-out 1: Plan for Your Problems- for all participants
- Copies of 'Hand-out 2: 7 Different Types of gNATS for all participants
- Copies of 'Hand-out 3: Challenge Their gNATS for all participants
- Copies of 'Hand-out 4: Challenge Your gNATS for all participants

## 10 MIN TRICKLE IN

The 'Take the Lesson' from last week was: "Ask participants to make one new goal this week. It might be in relation to education, work, family, friends, health or anything else".

Have a flip-chart stuck up on the wall drawn into six sections labelled:

Long Term	Long term or short term
Brand new goal	Goal I had before
Easy	Difficult

Invite participants to place a stickie in each box that describes their goal, and discuss patterns emerging as participants are arriving to class. Use it as an opportunity to learn a little about the different goals the class are looking at.

## 5 MIN WELCOME

**Breathing:** Start the session by practicing the breathing exercise we learned two minutes ago

- ▷ Explain that today we will practice a breathing exercise for one minute called 'square breathing'
- ▷ Explain that focussing on deep breathing has many benefits; it can help us relax and concentrate, and if we are anxious it is very helpful in reducing feelings of anxiety, it helps to push the blood from the old brain to the new brain so we can think more clearly. Some people may find breathing exercises difficult but should be gently encouraged to try, some will prefer to have their eyes open and some may like to close their eyes.
- ▷ Explain that during this exercise, participants should try to breathe deeply – this means breathing right down into the rib cage so it expands out when you breathe – you can feel this is working if you place your hand on the top of your stomach and it moves in and out when you breathe.
- ▷ Point to the slide and explain that we will try 'square breathing' – this means breathing in counting to four, holding counting to four, breathing out counting to four, and holding counting to four, and repeating this a few times.
- ▷ Talk the participants through the round:
  - Inhale, 2, 3, 4
  - Hold, 2, 3, 4
  - Exhale 2, 3, 4
  - Hold 2, 3, 4
- ▷ After a minute of this, ring the bell/mindfulness app, thank the participants and tell them we'll get started with the session.

**Introduction:** Remind participants that this is session four. In this session participants will learn:

- ▷ To look at challenges and difficult situations and categorise them as something they can solve easily, something that they can negotiate, or something they can't change
- ▷ To make a plan to deal with the challenge based on how they have categorised it
- ▷ To understand the psychology of Negative Automated Thoughts and how these thoughts can make challenges harder to manage



## EXERCISE ONE: READ THE LIGHTS

**AIM** Participants understand the value of assessing a challenging situation and planning a response accordingly

### OVERVIEW

This exercise has three parts

- 1) Group discussion
- 2) Exercise identifying green, orange and red situations
- 3) Small group discussion identifying situations from their own lives

### GROUP DISCUSSION

➔ SLIDE 2-5

#### OVERVIEW

If a young person is using the SORT it model when encountering a problem, they have shifted from old brain to new brain, remember what their goals are, and now they must decide the best way to deal with this situation so that it doesn't stop them from getting what they need. This is the part of the programme where they assess a situation with a calm mind and a clear goal, and decide on a strategy for dealing with the situation.

In the previous exercise, participants identified several barriers or challenges in achieving their own goals. Following on from this, the next concept to be tackled by the group relates to how some barriers can easily be overcome while some cannot. The aim of the traffic light exercise is to introduce participants to the concept of assessing a problem.



#### 1 EXPLAIN THE LIGHTS AND BRIEF DISCUSSION

- ▷ Challenges come up all the time that can stop us from reaching our goals in relation to work, education or our lives generally.
- ▷ Show participants the SORT It model again and explain that we are moving onto the third step, 'read the lights'. For this step, we understand that to respond effectively to a problem – to strategise, we need to understand what kind of problem it is.
- ▷ Problem situations can be defined into one of three categories –
  - A situation I can't change,
  - A situation I may be able to change
  - A situation I can change.

Each category shows the amount of flexibility that you have to change the situation. Use the following table and accompanying slides to help you have a class discussion about the three different categories of problems.

Problem colour	this means...	→ Another way of describing this colour	→ When might this happen
<b>Red</b>	I can't change it	→ There's nothing I can do to change this so I have to suck it up and get on with it	→ There are clear rules, which are not likely to change → Someone has a lot of power or authority and is using this to get their way  <i>Remember - A red situation is not always fair! Sometimes you have to deal with someone unfair to get something you want.</i>
<b>Orange</b>	I might change it	→ There might be something I can do here, let's see if there's a bit of give and take, I can negotiate	→ There are different perspectives → The person you are dealing with may listen to your perspective → You can clearly make an argument for your point of view and can identify a give or a take → Remember – Sometimes you will not know if you can negotiate until you try. In this scenario, ask yourself – what's the worst that can happen?
<b>Green</b>	I can change it	→ There's definitely something I can do here... I'll plan how to manage it, try it and see if it worked	→ If we change what we are doing then the situation will change. While it may be hard we have control.



## WHAT'S THE COLOUR

## → SLIDE 6

- ▷ The Facilitator designates three clear areas in the room using flipchart paper -“green”, „orange” and “red”. These areas are to correspond to the traffic light system introduced in the previous section.
- ▷ Following this, the facilitator should read out scenarios to the group (facilitator notes in the appendix)
- ▷ After reading out each story the facilitator should ask the class to move to the place which they believe represents the problem situation for the character in the vignette.
- ▷ Next facilitate a discussion between people who have moved in different directions, ask them why they choose this. Remember there is no completely right or wrong answer; it's about developing analytical skills. Some questions that may help:
  - What is the problem facing (character name)?
  - Ok, so do we think this is a problem he can fix quite easily? Do we think there might need to be negotiation/compromise on this or can (character name) not change this situation for himself?”
  - Will everyone in this scenario act the same (if not this indicates different ways of managing the situation)
  - “So John thinks this is a red light but Robert says this is orange, can you both explain why you chose that colour?”

20  
MIN

## FIND YOUR CHALLENGES

➔ SLIDE 7

- ▷ Hand out the 'Hand-out One: Plan for your Problem'
- ▷ Ask participants to work on their own but they can discuss in pairs or threes
- ▷ They must think about their goal, or any goal they have and identify the three types of problems that could occur in relation to their own goals – something they can't change, something they might have some influence on, and something they can definitely manage. They will have to use their imagination for this but can draw on their experiences from the past too
- ▷ Walk around the group to support them in analysing each situation.

## SUMMARISE

➔ SLIDE 8

- a) Throughout the entire exercise, the facilitator should remind participants that the ultimate aim here is to decide how they can achieve their goals despite any barriers placed in their way. The facilitator should also highlight that this course will involve learning the strategies and psychology of dealing with each type of problem (red, orange or green).
- b) Show people the serenity prayer on the slide or read it out, ask if people have heard it before. Let the group know that the next exercise is to support everyone developing the wisdom around telling the difference between green, orange and red situations:

35  
MIN

## EXERCISE TWO: NEGATIVE AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS<sup>1</sup>

**AIM** That participants understand:

- ▷ **That they have negative automatic thoughts that make it harder for them to respond well to challenges**
- ▷ **That there are ways to prevent and deal with these thoughts**

## OVERVIEW

There are two parts to this exercise

- a) A discussion about negative automatic thoughts (gNATS) that can prevent us from seeing a situation clearly
- b) A review of some stories to see what types of negative automatic thoughts the young people might have had

15  
MIN

## PART 1: GNAT PSYCHOLOGY DISCUSSION

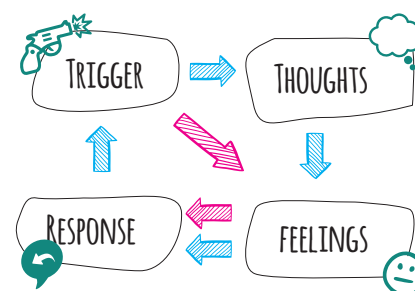
➔ SLIDE 9

### OVERVIEW

Negative automatic thoughts are thoughts that we have, often without even realising it, that might not be true or accurate. They can stop us from achieving what we want or from seeing things as they really are. If we slow down our thinking (i.e. Shifting from Old Brain to New Brain), notice the thoughts and challenge them, we can stop them from causing us harm or making things even more difficult for us. This is very important for red situations where often we may have to deal with negative automatic thoughts. Referring to the 'when a problem comes along' slide, discuss the following psychology:

<sup>1</sup> Please add a footnote: this section is adapted from 'Pesky gNATS', which was designed and developed by Handaxe CIC, a not-for profit Community Interest Company founded by David Coyle and Gary O'Reilly. Further information can be found on [www.peskygnats.com](http://www.peskygnats.com)

**Trigger:** Remember this from session 2? A trigger can be anything that makes us feel bad automatically, i.e. that can make us feel like fight or flight. Some triggers we may be able to easily identify, i.e. when someone ignores us, we get really angry, however some may be more subtle i.e. we don't know why being around a certain person in our group/class makes us feel like shutting down and not talking.



**Automatic thoughts:** Many of our thoughts occur automatically, when these are negative or untrue this can have a really bad impact on us. If something triggers us, we can have negative automatic thoughts. If we encounter a problem situation we can have thoughts that are negative and unhelpful such as: 'I'll never be able to do this' 'I failed because I'm stupid' 'everyone else can do it', 'he hates me and that's why he's challenging me'. We may not be aware we are having these negative thoughts (hence they are automatic) and so even bringing these to our attention is an important step in changing how we feel and what we do. We will look at the types of automatic thoughts next.

**Feelings and Response:** When we are working in our old brain and we encounter a trigger, we can have a negative automatic thought. It is these thoughts which cause an emotional response (like fear, embarrassment, stress). Our emotions can then determine our response. It is important to know that we cannot easily change our triggers, and it is hard to change our emotions – **however we can change the thoughts that determine our emotions.** It is our thoughts about a situation and not the situation that determines whether we react well or badly.

**New Brain:** However, if we work in our new, problem solving, rational brain, we can slow down our thinking in challenging situations, we do this through the following steps;

- ▷ Moving from our old brain to our new brain, by calming and centering ourselves
- ▷ Becoming aware of the negative automatic thoughts that might be holding us back from using the best strategy to solve the problem. Once we are aware of automatic negative thoughts then (with a little bit of work) we can change these,
- ▷ This can change our emotions, and make it easier to engage effectively with choices we want to make to achieve our long or short term goals.

**Now Read through the 'Seven Different Types of gNATS' hand-out with the whole class.** Each gNATS has an example to illustrate each one, ask participants if they can think of any other examples.



## PART 2 STORIES: CHALLENGE THEIR GNATS

- ▷ Participants break into pairs
- ▷ Using the handout 'challenge their gNATS, read each story aloud
- ▷ Ask the pairs to answer the four questions in relation to each story
- ▷ Facilitate a group discussion after each story and small group discussion time

When there is ten minutes left ask them to quietly complete the sheet on one or two of their own gNATS, they can discuss this with their partner if they feel comfortable.

## SUMMARY OF LESSON

To summarise, let the class know that:

- ▷ By taking control of their negative automatic thoughts (gNATS) then they can reduce negative emotions that can lead to them not having the best response to a situation.
- ▷ Simply by being aware of their own gNATS is a really great first step. The next thing to do is then to challenge their own thinking and by doing this the gNATS will eventually be replaced by more true and more useful thinking. This results in less negative emotions!



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**AIM** **Reflection:** Ask everyone to say one word that describes how they are feeling right now  
**Take the Lesson:** Ask participants to keep an eye out for their gNATS, and come back with a story of how they've beaten one of their gNATS during the week

Grounding

- ▷ Explain that every week, to formally close the group that we will do the same exercise which is to ground ourselves and focus ourselves
- ▷ Ring the bell/mindfulness app
- ▷ Ask participants to take a deep breath, look at their feet and feel them on the ground, and then concentrate on feeling their hands and feet and what they are touching.
- ▷ Ask them to think about something they are feeling grateful for; this may be something about themselves, another person, something they are looking forward to etc.
- ▷ Thank the participants and wish them well until next week




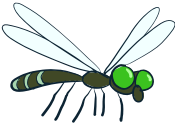

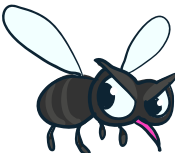


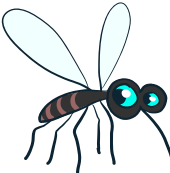
## HAND-OUT ONE: PLAN FOR YOUR PROBLEMS

Problem Colour	What it Means	Another Way of Saying it	What 'green' problems could happen in relation to your goal?
<b>RED</b>	<b>I can't change it</b>	<p>There's nothing I can do to change this so I have to suck it up and get on with it.</p> <p>I have grit. I can get through this.</p>	
<b>ORANGE</b>	<b>I might change it</b>	<p>There might be something I can do here</p> <p>Let's see if there's a bit of give and take.</p> <p>I can negotiate.</p>	
<b>GREEN</b>	<b>I can change it</b>	<p>There's definitely something I can do here... I'll plan how to manage it.</p> <p>This is up to me</p>	

## FACILITATOR NOTES: WHAT COLOUR ARE THESE STORIES?

- a) John is in 5th year. He has been focused on his girlfriend lately, as she has had some real problems going on with her family, as a result he has not done much study for his summer exams. He failed some of his exams at Christmas, and if he fails summer ones he may have to repeat the year. He really doesn't want this to happen. He's not sure he's smart enough to stay in school now. What's the colour?
- b) Jamie is working a part-time job in a cinema, which he starts at about 6pm every evening. Jamie also helps his parents out by looking after his little sister until 5pm. As he has to get a bus to work, he is regularly 15 minutes late for work every day. Jamie's manager has told him that if he is late one more time he will be fired, but Jamie has to look after his sister and thinks he has no choice but to be fired. What colour do you think this situation is?
- c) Brooklyn is training to be a mechanic. A month ago, his boss Paddy told him that he could start working directly with the customers this week, but today told him that he's not ready because he has a bad attitude. Brooklyn is furious because Paddy broke his promise and now he feels like quitting. Paddy won't budge on it.
- d) Carol is on a work placement in a restaurant kitchen as part of her course. She told the head chef that she wants to help out with the food prep. The head chef says that she hasn't proven that she can work under pressure so won't let her start food prep yet.
- e) Jake is called into the principal's office with his teacher who says Jake is being disruptive. Jake starts to explain that he knows he used to be disruptive but lately has been really trying in class and it wasn't actually him who threw the other classmates books out the window. The teachers' word is taken over his own. Jake feels like he will explode, the teacher is wrong and the principle should not listen to him. What colour is this situation for Jake?

## HAND-OUT TWO: 7 DIFFERENT TYPES OF GNATS<sup>2</sup>: NEGATIVE AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS

	<p><b>OVER-GENERALISING GNAT</b>  <b>His sting makes you think:</b> If something bad happens once, it'll happen again and again  <i>Example:</i> after failing a maths test, Jamie says to himself 'I'll never be good at maths'</p>
	<p><b>SELECTIVE THINKING GNAT</b>  <b>Her sting makes you:</b> Only focus on the bad parts of stuff  <i>Example:</i> At the end of a party at the youth club, with great music and food and loads of fun, Jenny got into trouble for horseplay. She told everyone what a terrible night it was and didn't point out any of the good stuff.</p>
	<p><b>BLACK AND WHITE THINKING GNAT</b>  <b>His sting makes you:</b> think everything is either good or bad, with no in between.  <i>Example:</i> Jack's Dad told him that he didn't like one of the lads he was hanging around with and Jack is furious because he thinks his dad hates his friends.</p>
	<p><b>PERSONALISING GNAT</b>  <b>Her sting makes you:</b> blame people for doing things to you, even if what they were doing wasn't anything to do with you  <i>Example:</i> Jenny tells Melanie she can't come over that evening because she has to go to her Nana's. Melanie decides that Jenny doesn't like her and that's why she's not coming over.</p>
	<p><b>JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS GNAT</b>  <b>His sting makes you:</b> presume something, even if you don't have anything to back it up  <i>Example:</i> Alex came home and found money gone from his bedside table. He presumed it had been stolen by his sister Lorraine (Alex forgot he had put it away somewhere earlier)</p>
	<p><b>PREDICTING THE FUTURE GNAT</b>  <b>Her sting makes you:</b> presume all the worst possible things are going to happen  <i>Example:</i> Courtney says that her brother's never going to get off drugs</p>
	<p><b>CHEWING OVER IT GNAT</b>  <b>His sting makes you:</b> spend all the time thinking over and over about something bad that happened  <i>Example:</i> Gary's mam told him that he was lazy before he left for school. Gary spent the rest of the day thinking about it and being angry about it</p>

2 This is adapted from [www.peskygnats.com](http://www.peskygnats.com) and the National Family Support Network's young people's support programme ([www.nfsn.ie](http://www.nfsn.ie))

## HAND-OUT THREE: CHALLENGE THEIR GNATS

For each of the following stories, challenge their gNATS:

### Lucy

Lucy works in Penney's and she is told by her supervisor to go and arrange the new jumpers by colour and size. Lucy is supposed to go on her 15-minute break now but her supervisor says it's urgent. She gets annoyed with her supervisor and says, 'you think I'm really lazy and that's why you're making me do this' and 'you gave everyone else their break on time... why are you always picking on me'. Her supervisor becomes very annoyed and says she will get a warning.

- 1) What gNATS are stinging Lucy?
- 2) Are her thoughts true?
- 3) Is there another possible explanation? What is it?
- 4) Flip it to the positive; what could Lucy think instead?

### Jamie:

Jamie's parents are fighting downstairs. He starts feeling really sad and agitated because lots of his friends' parents have split up, and he doesn't want to move out of the house. He finds it hard to concentrate on his homework for the rest of the night and also starts freaking out about getting kicked out of class for not doing his homework.

- 1) What gNATS are stinging Jamie
- 2) Are her thoughts true
- 3) Is there another possible explanation? What is it?
- 4) Flip it to the positive; what could Jamie think instead?

## HAND-OUT FOUR CHALLENGE YOUR OWN GNATS

Think of a recent challenging situation, when you may have faced your own triggers (i.e. you felt really angry or lashed out, wanted to run away, or felt you could not speak up).

1) Describe your situation very briefly:

2) What gNATS may you have been experiencing?

3) Are your gNATS thoughts true (**really challenge yourself or each other, can you prove they are true thoughts**)?

4) Is there another possible explanation? What is it?

5) Flip it to the positive; what could you think instead?