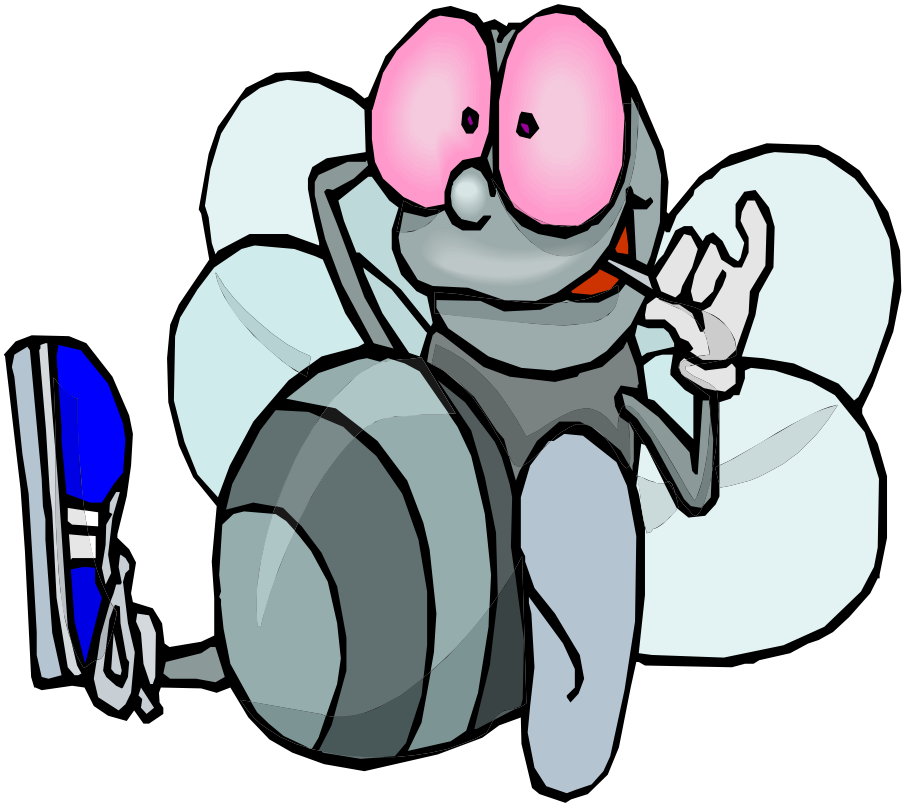
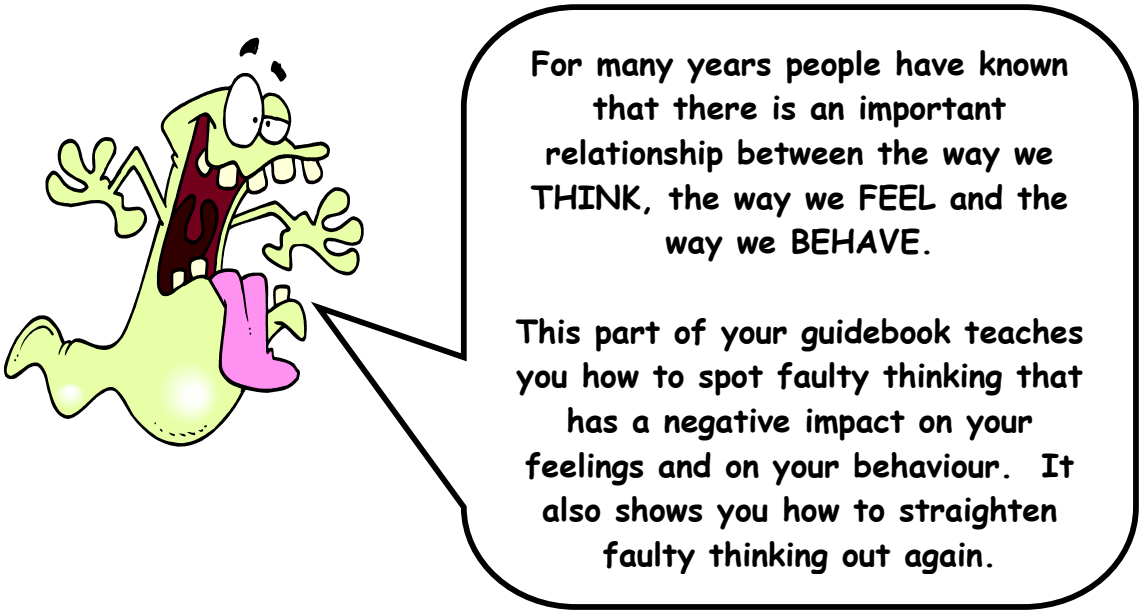
Part 6.

A Teenager's Guide to…

Thinking Straight.

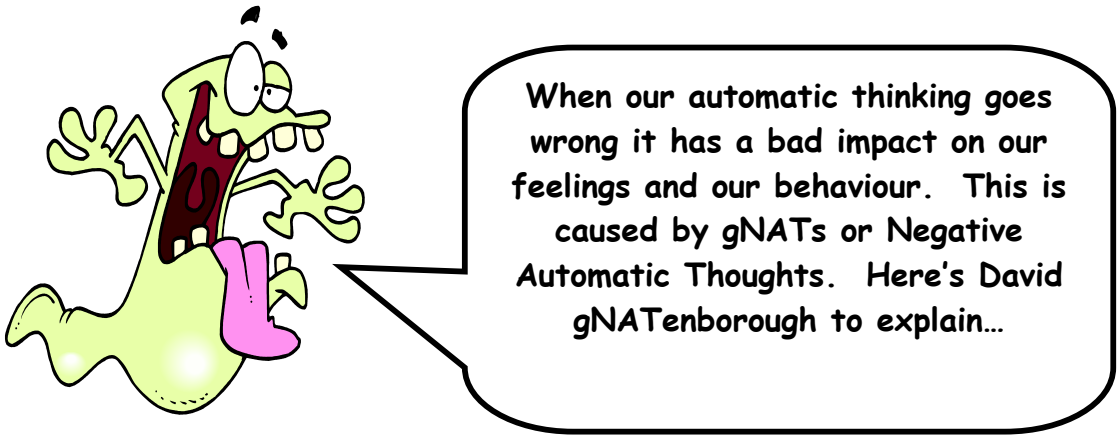




Most of the time we don't notice what we are thinking because it happens so quickly and is an automatic thing for us to do. See if you can begin to spot the relationship between your thinking and your feelings and behaviour…

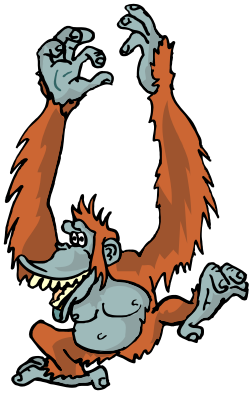
Can you think of a time when the way you thought about something had an important impact on the way you felt?

Can you think of a time when the way you thought about something had an important impact on the way you the way you behaved?



David gNATenborough

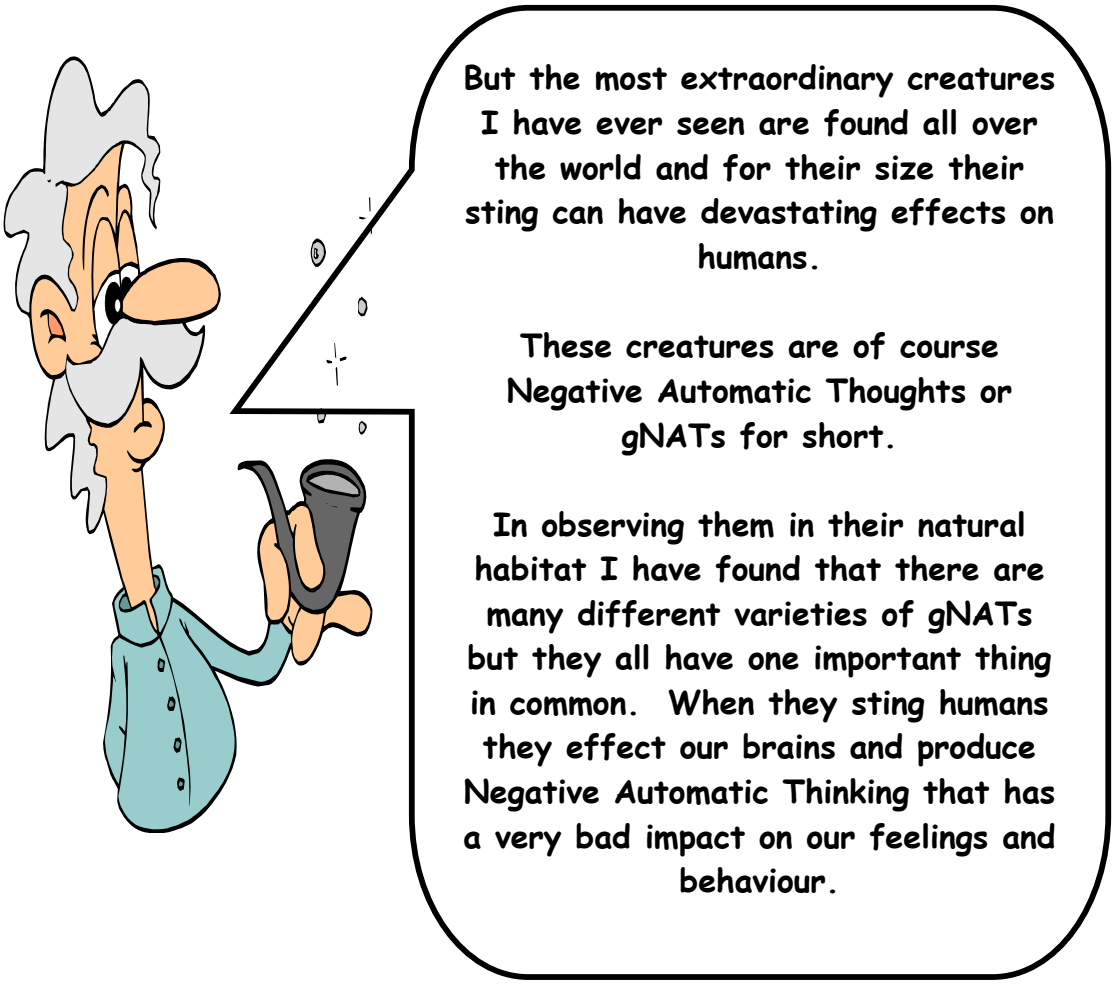
Like the Man-Eating Sheep of Connemara who gobble-up unsuspecting farmers…

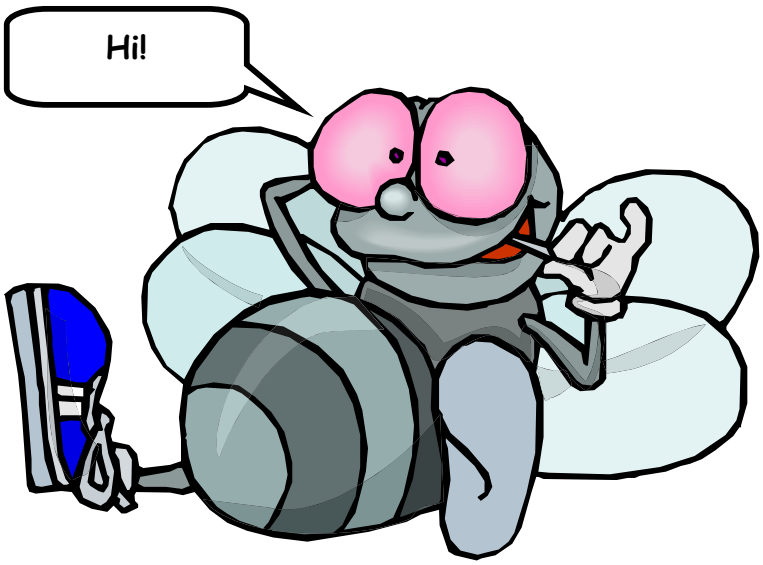


The Funky Monkeys of Ibiza who hang out in all the best clubs…

The Moon Jumping Cows of Cape Canavral.

And the Roller-Blading Hippos of San Diego





The Common gNAT (*Genus Negitivus Automaticibus Thoughtimus)*

Once we have stung a human we can effect their brains to produce a huge variety of Negative Automatic Thinking (NAT). However, all forms of NAT have the following 6 characteristics that they share. Negative Automatic Thoughts are:

Automatic: They just pop into your head without any effort on your part.

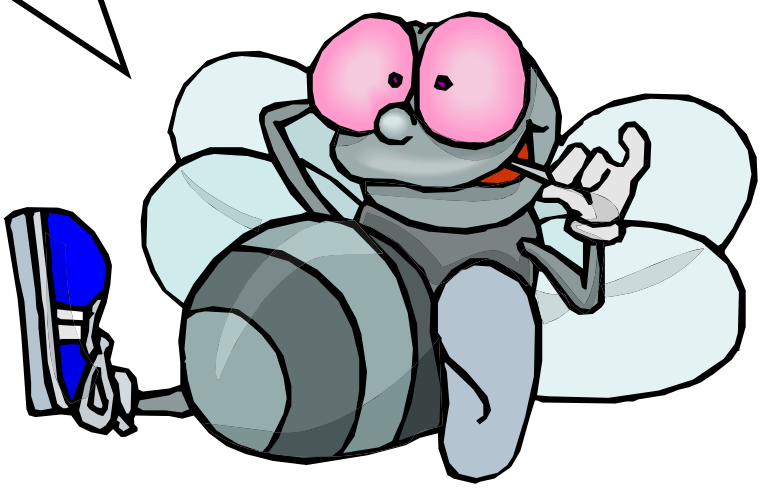
Hidden: People usually don't notice them.

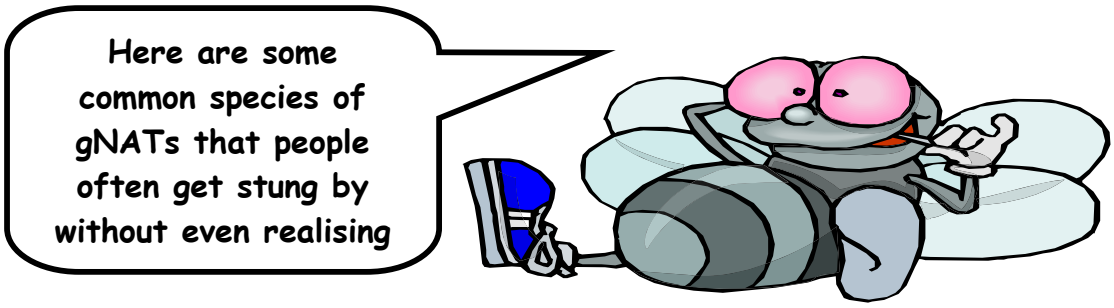
Distorted: They make you think in a wonky way that ignores the evidence in front of you.

Unhelpful: They make you feel negative emotions like depression, worry, and anger. They also make it difficult for people to do things that they would like to do to enjoy life more.

Reasonable: People accept NATs as facts even though they are wonky thoughts and it does not occur to most humans to check them out.

Involuntary: You do not choose to have NATs, and they can be very difficult to switch off.





The Over-Generalising gNAT: Their sting results in people making sweeping judgements based on one experience. For example, Kate was in training for the high jump and tried to clear a personal best height. She didn't make it on her first attempt and was stung by an over-generalising gNAT and thought 'I'll never be able to jump that high' and gave up without trying again. Without being stung by the gNAT she would have kept practicing and improved her jumping skills.

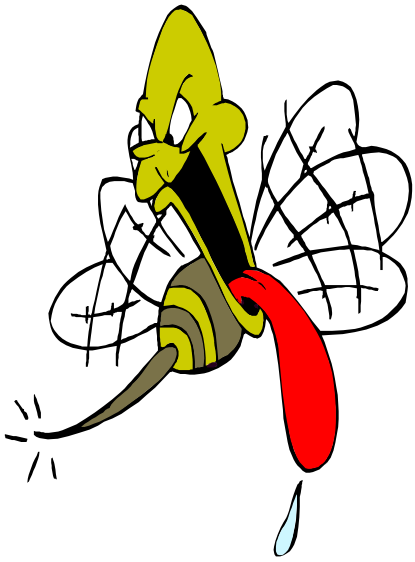
The Selective Thinking gNAT: Causing people to concentrate only on the bad parts of their experience. For example, after he was stung by a selective thinking gNAT John decided that he hated going to school and often thought about the subjects and teachers he didn't like. He never thought about the parts of school that he did enjoy like meeting his mates, History class, and sports.

The Black and White Thinking gNAT: Causing people to think in extremes. Maria was stung by a black and white thinking gNAT and when she said something foolish without realising it in front of her friends they started to laugh. Her black and white thinking told her that just because her friends laughed at her this time: 'They must all think I'm stupid.'

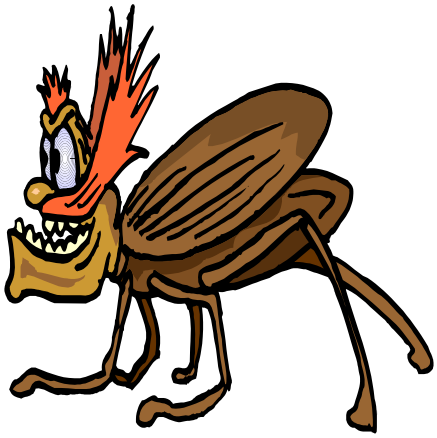
The Personalising gNAT: Causing people to take responsibility for things that have nothing to do with them. David was walking to the shops when he passed Melanie on the other side of the street. Melanie didn't say hello because she didn't see him, but David was stung by a personalising gNAT so he thought: 'She didn't say hello because she doesn't like me.'

The Jumping to Conclusions gNAT: Causing people to jump to conclusions about things without enough evidence to make a conclusion or without considering alternatives. Mark was stung by a jumping to conclusions gNAT when he came home from school and found some of his money had gone from his bedroom. He jumped to the conclusion that it had been stolen by his brother Stephen.

The Complete Disaster gNAT: Causing people to presume that everything is a complete disaster. Aishling wanted to buy a great present for Zoe's birthday and decided on a new black top that she knew her friend had her eye on for some time. When she went to town the shop only had dark grey left which she bought instead. Afterwards when she was wrapping her friend's present she was stung by a complete disaster gNAT and thought: 'My present is a complete disaster. Zoe's going to hate it.'



The Predicting the Future gNAT: Causing people to presume that the worst possible things are going to happen in the future. Karl was depressed and was stung by a predicting the future gNAT that made him think: 'I am never going to get better.'



The Ruminating gNAT: Causing people to think over and over and over and over again and again and again in their head about something that has upset them. Kelly was annoyed when a class mate said something she didn't like. After she was stung by a ruminating gNAT she spent the rest of the day thinking about it.

The Unnecessary Delaying gNAT: Greg was nervous about taking his driving test and after he was stung by an unnecessary delaying gNAT he told himself: 'I'll put off sending in my application form 'till next week.' A week later he again told himself the same thing…

David gNATenborough's Guide to Pest Control.

Luckily there is a cure for the effects of gNAT stings.

The first step involves learning how to capture gNATs. You can find out how to do this using my gNAT trap. Once you have mastered the art of catching your own gNATs you can learn how to counter their effects using my straight thinking guide.

My gNAT trap is fully outlined on the next three pages. As you will see there are three important parts in a fully functional gNAT trap. These are:

1. Recognising the situations where gNATs strike you.

In the examples of different species of gNATs that we have looked at we have seen that they love to lurk around ordinary everyday places like home, school, on the way to the shop, sports-grounds, and places where we meet friends.

2. Recording carefully the things that gNATs make you think.

Again our examples have shown us that gNATs are usually brief statements that quickly go through our minds like;

- 'I'll put off sending in my application form 'till next week.'
- 'I am never going to get better.'
- 'My present is a complete disaster. Zoe's going to hate it.'
- 'She didn't say hello because she doesn't like me.'
- 'They must all think I'm stupid.'
- 'I'll never be able to jump that high'

3. Recognising how gNATs have a bad effect on your feelings, behaviour and subsequent thinking.

gNATs effect our feelings by producing negative emotions like sadness, depression, worry, low self-esteem, anger, and aggressiveness.

They change our behaviour by making us no longer do things we enjoy or by making us give-up on things that we think will be difficult by convincing us that we cannot do them.

They also effect our subsequent thinking by getting to us continue to think in a negative way.

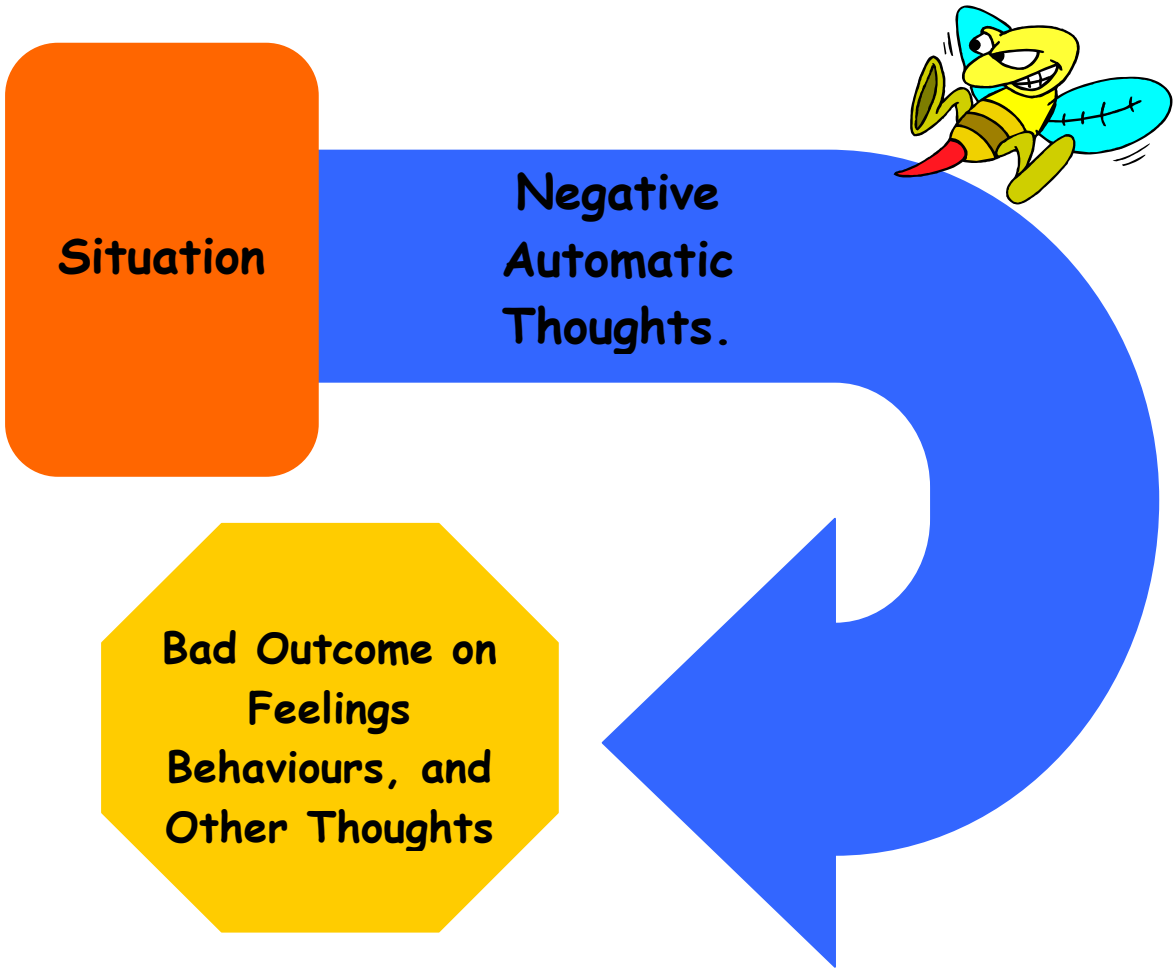
David gNATenborough's gNAT Trap.

This is what a gNAT Trap looks like:

1. It starts with catching a SITUATION that prompts your Negative Automatic Thinking.

2. It then traps your NEGATIVE AUTOMATIC THINKING. At first glance Negative Automatic Thinking often seems to start out reasonably enough but it ends up leading you backwards as its more negative side takes over.

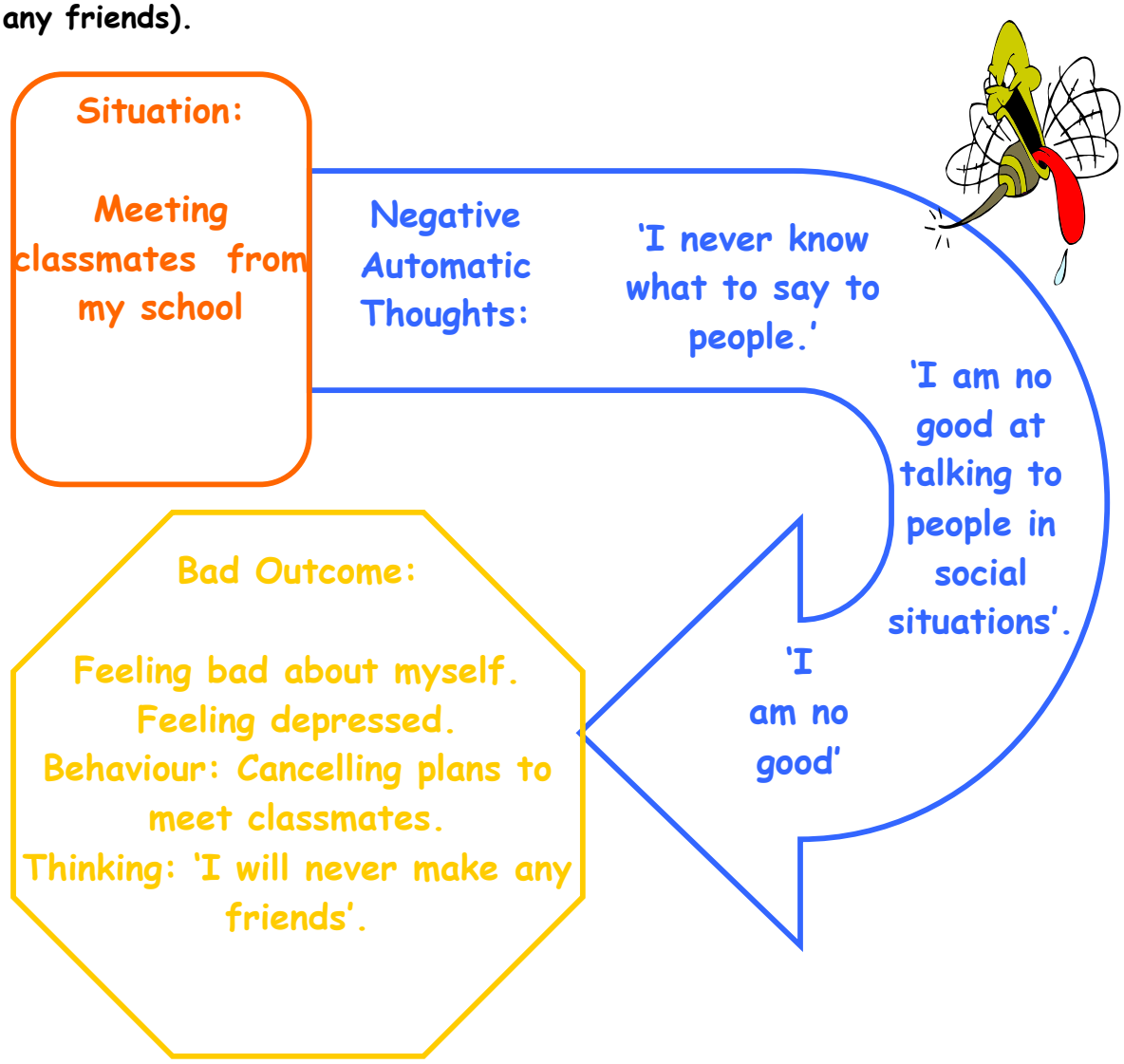
3. It then captures how your Negative Automatic Thinking has a bad influence on your feelings, behaviour and subsequent thinking. Once the Negative Automatic Thinking strikes it has a bad outcome on the way you FEEL, the things you DO, and the way you THINK afterwards.



Joanna's gNAT Trap.

Here's an example of a pesky gNAT captured by Joanna who often felt shy about meeting people that she didn't know very well.

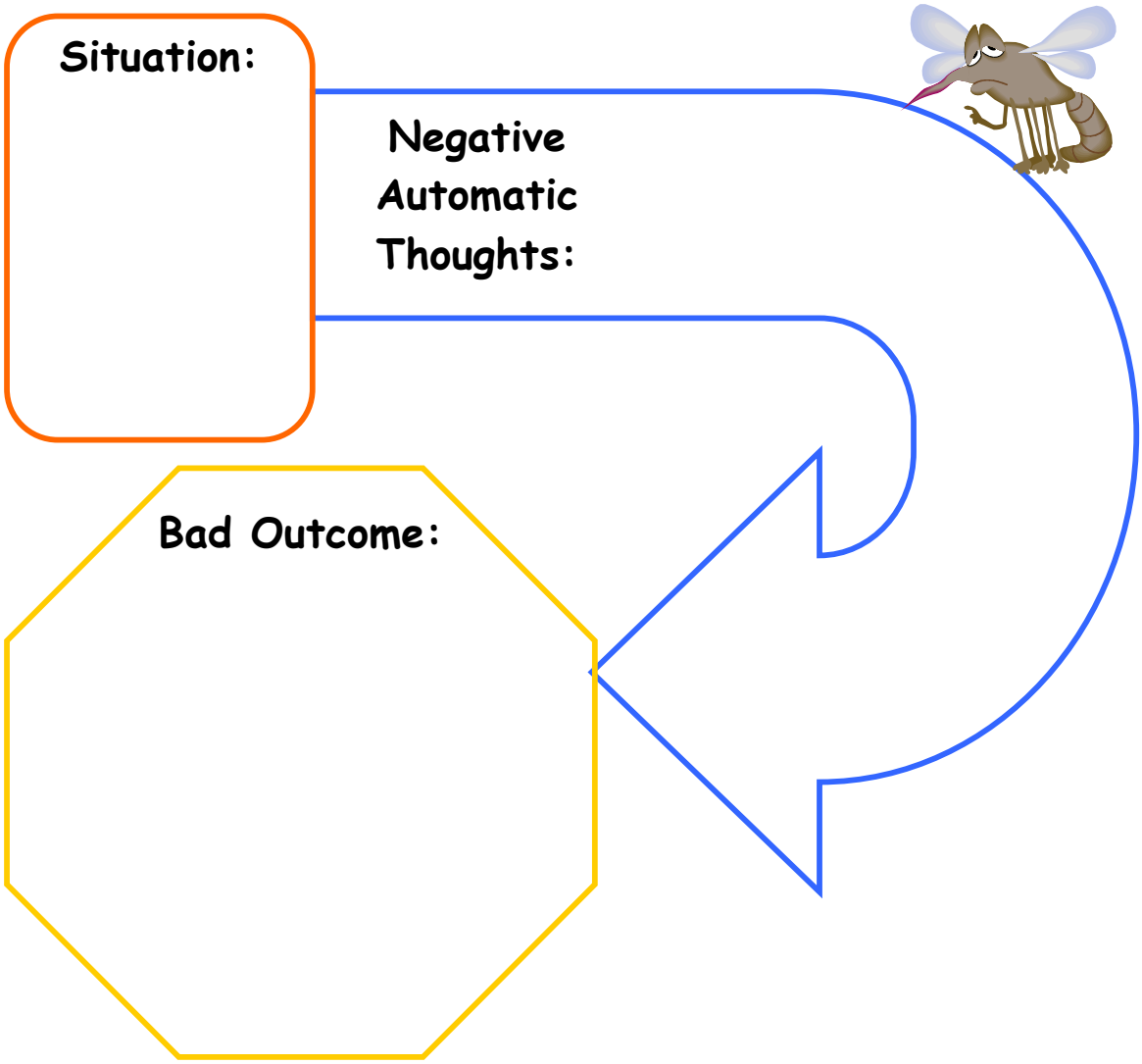
Her SITUATION is 'having to meet some classmates that she doesn't know very well after school on a Friday evening'. Her NEGATIVE AUTOMATIC THINKING starts out reasonably enough (υ 'I never know what to say to people') but it ends up leading her backwards ('I am no good at talking to people in social situations' υ 'I am no good'). Her negative automatic thinking effects her FEELINGS (she feels depressed and bad about herself), her BEHAVIOUR (she cancels her plans to go out), and her THINKING (she thinks she will never make any friends).



Because Joanna accepts her gNATs without checking if they are correct and changes her behaviour by not going out she misses the chance of having a good time with some new friends and learning that she can do fine in social situations.

Can You Capture a Pesky gNAT?

Use this sheet to start catching your own gNATs…



What species of gNAT have you captured? Is it on our list or have you discovered a new one?

Can You Capture a Pesky gNAT?

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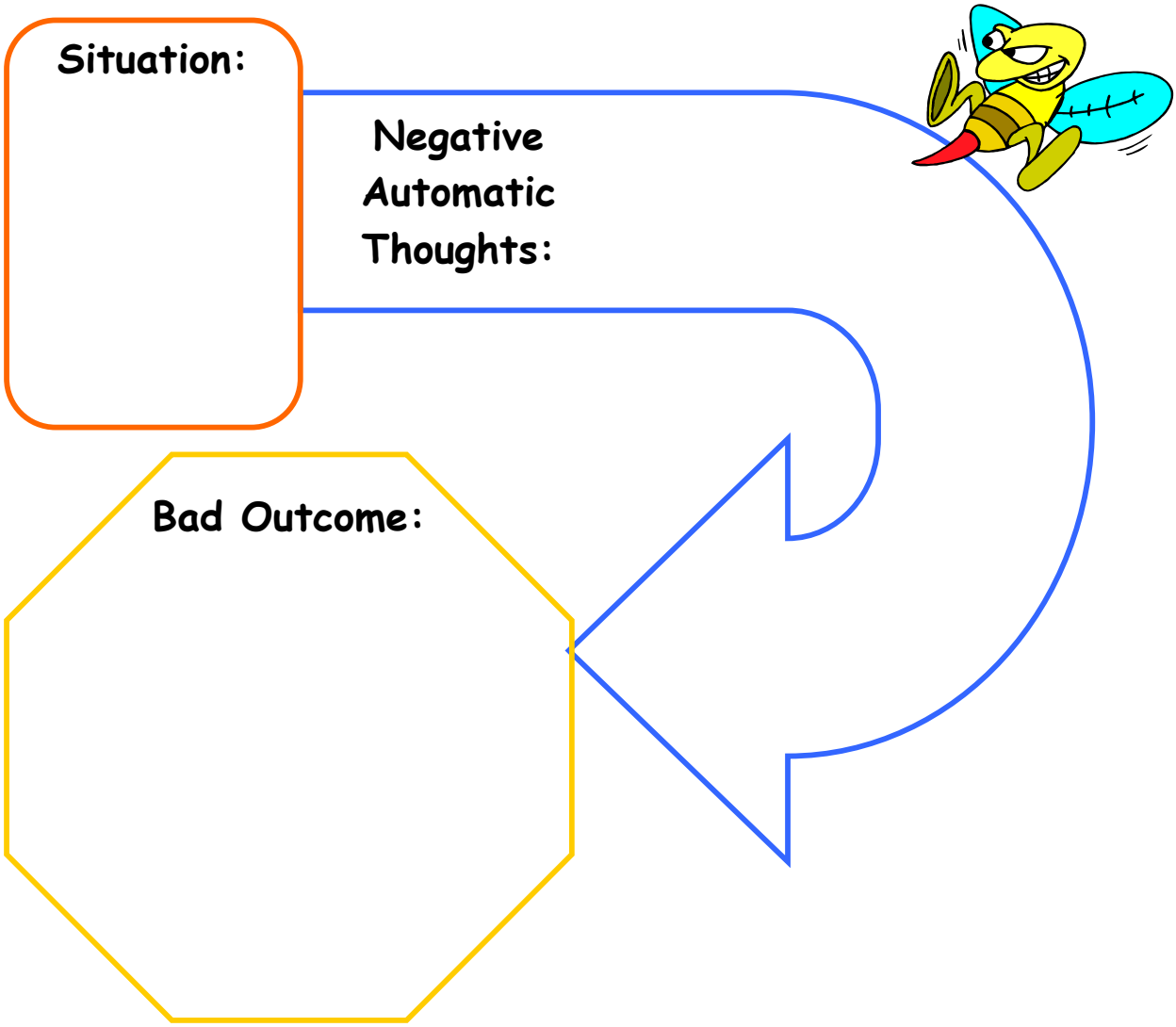

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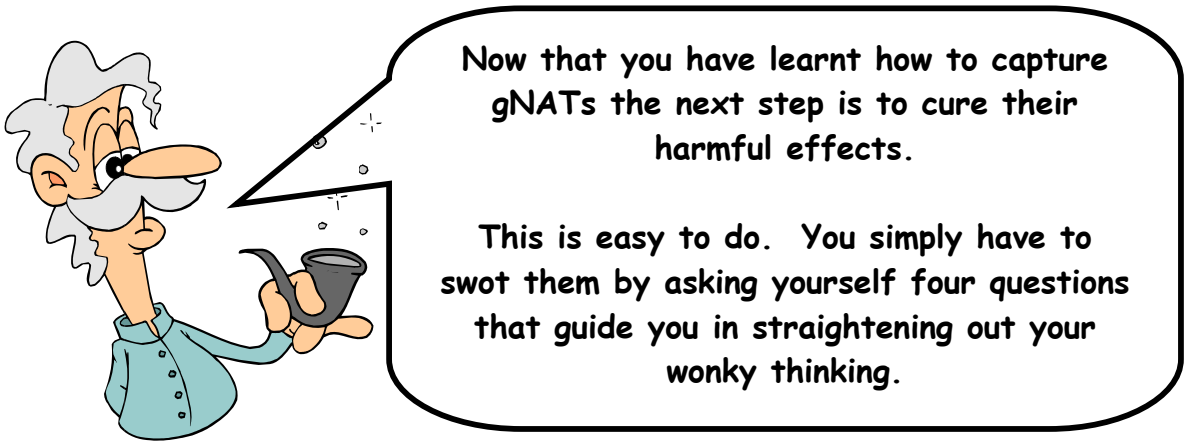
David gNATenborough's Guide to Pest Control.



gNAT Swotting Question No. 1:
What is the evidence for my Negative Automatic Thinking?

gNAT Swotting Question No. 2:
What alternative ways of looking at things are there?

gNAT Swotting Question No. 3:
What effect does thinking this way have on me?

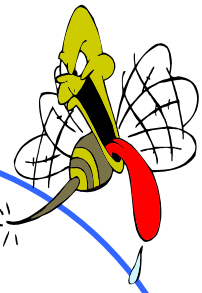
gNAT Swotting Question No. 4:
What species of gNAT have I been stung by?

On the next page Joanna shows how she sorted out her gNATs with the four gnat swotting questions.

First of all she gave a rating from 0-100% for how much she believed each of her gNATs. She decided that she believed them 90%, 90%, 85%, and 85%. Then she asked herself the four gNAT swotting questions (evidence?, alternatives?, effects?, and species of gNAT?). Next she reviewed how much she now believed each of her gNATs to be true. She wrote in green that she now only believed them 20%, 20%, 15% and 15%. She discovered in asking the four questions she could stop her gNATs from having a bad influence on her feelings, behaviour and subsequent thinking.

Have a look at how she has used the four gNAT swotting questions and then have a go at gNAT swotting for yourself on some of the Negative Automatic Thoughts you captured earlier…

Joanna's gNAT Swotting.



Situation:

Meeting classmates from my school

Negative Automatic Thoughts:

'I never know what to say to people (90%).'

20%

'I am no good at talking to people in social situations' (90%).

20%

'I am no good' (85%).

15%

Bad Outcome:
Feeling bad about myself.
Feeling depressed.
Behaviour: Cancelling plans to meet classmates.
Thinking: 'I will never make any friends' (85%).

15%

Evidence?

When I think about it I spend most of my time talking to people at home, at school, and at my part-time job so its not true that I never know what to say to people in social situations.
Its not true that I am no good. I can think of lots of good things about me: I am honest, have a good sense of humour and care about my family and friends.
I have some very good friends.

Alternatives?

The alternative ways of looking at things are that I have been stung by some gNATs and that while I am shy when I meet people first I usually get over it. In fact many people are shy and a bit uncomfortable when they first meet people this doesn't mean that they are useless and no good.

Effects?

The effects of my Negative Automatic Thinking were that I got into a spiral of negative thinking, I felt bad about myself, I felt depressed, I cancelled my plans to go out and missed a good evening, and I thought it was hopeless for me to make friends. Its important that I swot my gNATs so they do not have a bad effect on my feelings and make me change my behaviour.

Species of gNAT?

I think my species of gNAT were:

Predicting the future,
Over-generalising,
Selective thinking,
Black and white thinking,
Jumping to conclusions.

Swot Some gNATs.

Situation:

Negative Automatic Thoughts:

Bad Outcome:

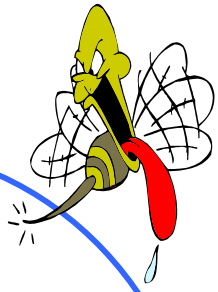
Evidence?

Alternatives?

Effects?

Species of gNAT?

Swot Some gNATs.



Situation:

Negative Automatic Thoughts:

Bad Outcome:

Evidence?

Alternatives?

Effects?

Species of gNAT?

Thinking Straight.

From completing this part of my guidebook I think the most important things about thinking straight are…

1.

2.

3.

4.