Hello. I'd like to welcome everyone to our webinar today, "Disrupting Negative Thoughts." My name is Katie Muhlhammer. I'll be your host. We're glad you're here with us.

Before I introduce our presenter today, I do want to mention a couple quick resources for you. If you take a look on the left-hand side of your screen you're going to see an event resources section. We have a copy of our presenter's slides there for you, as well as an additional resource you may want to print out and refer back to as an additional help for you or those that you care about in your life. So a couple resources for you related to today's topics.

We also have an ask-a-question section. You're welcome to type that in at any point and send that to us, we'll send that to you via e-mail and get that back to us via e-mail, and I'll share a little bit more about that at the end.

So we are very pleased to have with us today Renae Eades. She has a Masters in Social Work. She's also a licensed clinical social worker. And she earned her Bachelor's degree in Psychology from the University of North Carolina at Pembroke, after she served for six years in the U.S. army and was honorably discharged. She then earned her Masters degree in Clinical Social Work from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington.

Renae has an interest in vulnerable populations and family systems, and so she works in a number of settings; community intensive counseling, outpatient private practice, as well as a residential women’s treatment program before she found her professional niche in the EAP counselling support field. Renae hails from a military family, and she's got a life-long interest in helping veterans. She desires to offer them support through volunteering and hopes to continue excelling in the EAP field professionally.

On a personal note, Renae is mom to a poodle and a rabbit, and she also enjoys fishing and weekend outings to the movie theater in her free time. So I know this is a topic that Renae is well versed to speak on, and so we're real thrilled to have her presenting today’s session for us. So, Renae, I'm going to go ahead and turn it over to you to get us started. Thank you very much, Katie. Hello everyone. Very happy to be presenting with you all today as far as our topic, Disrupting Negative Thoughts. So we'll go ahead and jump right into this.

Just real briefly, our learning objectives for today, we’re going to identify the symptoms and causes of negative thoughts, learn how to apply strategies to disrupt negative thoughts, understand when additional help or support is needed, and the different types of help available. Okay, so before we kind of get into some of the material to be presented today, I want you to have a brief survey that I really want to encourage you all to partake in, and then we'll discuss that in a moment. But an essential question here is are negative thoughts normal, yes or no? So I'm going to toss it back to Katie to tell you guys how to take the survey.
Great. Thanks Renae. So I've gone ahead and sent the survey out to everyone. You do have that up on your screen. You can simply click "Yes" or "No." What is your personal opinion or your thought on that particular question Renae shared? Do you think that negative thoughts are normal or not? So once you've gone ahead and completed that survey, you will be able to see where others who are participating in the webinar, kind of where they stand as far as that question as well.

All right, so I'm going to go ahead and pass that back to you, Renae, and we'll go ahead and continue on. Thank you everyone.

Thank you so much, Katie. So are negative thoughts normal? The actual answer to that is, yes, of course they are. If you said no, that's quite all right. I definitely understand your perspective too. So I want you guys to bear in mind that it's not having negative thoughts essentially that is the issue, but rather when we believe the negative thoughts. So later in this presentation we'll definitely be sharing some strategies for how to disrupt these negative thoughts and maybe turn them into positive ones or explore other ways to cope with them.

I additionally want to share that according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, or NAMI, as some of you are familiar with, everyone experiences negative thoughts, and they also experience additional emotional symptoms like anxiety or depression. But the key is when, you know, the thoughts become so overpowering that it impacts or interferes with our daily lives. So in having, you know, some extended symptoms like that, where you might be having issues at work or at home or your emotional wellbeing, that's when it's usually time to consider to get some extra help as you may be developing an anxiety disorder or depressive or mood disorder, panic disorder, maybe develop some phobias, generalized anxiety disorder and things on down that arena.

And just some quick statistics, in the U.S. it's estimated that about 40 million of adults or 18% of the adult population currently have an anxiety disorder with symptoms typically occurring before the age of 21. So it's definitely good to be mindful, you know, as you partake in this webinar moving forward, you know, why you're having negative thoughts and what additional symptoms have come along with that, so you can definitely be sure to address them appropriately.

So, getting into talk about anxiety, anxiety can present it itself in different ways in our body our in our lives and two significant ways are emotionally and physically. And so, just briefly, in terms of emotional symptoms of anxiety, these could be feelings of apprehension or dread; feeling tense and jumpy, some people consider that nervousness; restlessness or irritability; being short-tempered; or anticipating the worst and being watchful for signs of danger when there may or may not be cause to do so, like an impending feeling of doom perhaps.

Some physical symptoms of anxiety include pounding or racing heartbeat and shortness of breath, having an upset stomach, sweating, tremors or twitches in your limbs,
headache, fatigue, insomnia or sleep disturbances, an upset stomach, or frequent urination or diarrhea.

So, as I mentioned before, definitely when we start perhaps experiencing some of the aforementioned symptoms we'll definitely want to know, you know, what's causing this. And typically, you know, researchers like to look at two main sources, genetic factors or stress. And studies do show that, you know, there is evidence of anxiety disorders occurring among some family members, but oftentimes a stressful or traumatic event, you know, such as the unfortunate death of a loved one, forms of abuse, or long term illness, can actually trigger the beginnings of an anxiety disorder. So we will discuss later in this session treatments that are available and what to do if you feel that anxiety is significantly impacting your life.

Now, when it comes to symptoms of depression, you know, which can become, unfortunately, a feature if you've been having some negative thoughts that you're struggling to cope with, symptoms of depression can present psychologically or mentally, you know, another word for some of you out there, physical symptoms or, you know, having some impact on your social functioning. So, in terms of psychological symptoms of depression, this can definitely be having lowered or negatively impacted self-esteem, feeling tearful at times, or feeling anxious, worried, or nervous.

Some physical symptoms of depression can include unexplained aches and pains. And I find this to be very unique, as this is something that I hear a lot from clients that I work with in the EAP field, and they generally follow up with their family doctors to find that, you know, it could be depression causing those unexplained body aches and pains rather than a medical cause. So it's definitely key to be in tune with your body, as well as your mental and emotional functioning to be on the lookout for symptoms of depression. Further symptoms of physical depression also include a decreased energy level, and similar to anxiety, sleep disturbances.

And lastly, with symptoms of depression, in terms of social functioning, there might be a desire to sort of reduce your social involvement or isolate, you know, avoiding friends or having difficulty at work, whether that's with your performance or kind of conversing with coworkers. So as you can see, both anxiety and depression symptoms can negatively impact different areas of your life.

So, when we're looking at ways to sort of treat these things, the terms of treatment of depression, one of the first things a practitioner or counselor may do is just, you know, better assess your depression to see if there are mild, moderate, or severe symptoms that are impacting you. Oftentimes treatment of depression can involve medication, talk therapy, or, you know, even encouraging some self-help coping strategies. But a lot of the time it's never a bad idea to seek some medical attention and maybe have a checkup with your family physician to kind of determine what's going on and how to treat it. Now, in addition to, you know, some of the treatments of depression, we will talk a little bit later, more in-depth about some of those different forms of treatment and self-help coping strategies.
So when looking at going back to, you know, how to disrupt negative thoughts, prior to perhaps developing some anxiety and depression symptoms, we want to look at, first, how to prevent them, so we call this "utilizing reframing technique." So some of the techniques that we'll explore are labeling the thoughts, thanking your mind, letting the thoughts float away, saying the thoughts in a funny voice, or moving forward anyway.

So the first helpful set of strategies, labeling the thoughts, this could be, for example, instead of thinking, you know, gosh, I'm going to mess this up or I'm going to fail at this challenge, try reframing that statement and changing your mindset to I'm having the thought that I'm going to mess up or fail at this challenge. Because by actually just reframing that sentence you're acknowledging within yourself that you're having this negative thought but it doesn't necessarily mean that the outcome or concern is going to be true. By consistently getting into the practice of labeling your thought, you might be better able to disrupt the negative thought so that you're not necessarily believing it. Because, remember, it's okay to have negative thoughts. It's totally normal at times in your life in response to certain stressors.

So the next technique for reframing, thanking your mind. Here is an example. If you're worried about a particular situation, you can say, "Thank you, mind, for your concern, but I've got this handled." You know, by reframing some of those negative thoughts and tapping into your self-confidence, giving yourself reassurance, it's another way to kind of stop you from believing in that negative thought and, thus, disrupting it.

So, moving forward, we have the technique, letting the thoughts float away. So for people who may be creative or, you know, very insightful about ways that they can help themselves cope kind of internally mentally, maybe imagine placing your negative thought like on a leaf and just letting it float down a quiet stream, away from your awareness, aware from your consciousness so that you're not more so inclined to believe in the negative thought. And, you know, this could go either way. You know, instead of a stream, you know, if you have a favorite place or favorite hobby, maybe put yourself in that situation or location. Put the thought somewhere in that scene, and handle it, you know, by remembering, you know, this place that you like to do, you know.

Some people like sports or golfing or, you know, visiting a family member's house. Placing it in a positive thought might be a great way to kind of let it float away and reframe that negative thought. And for some people, you know, having comedic approach to some of their negative disruptive thoughts can be helpful to them. So, you know, perhaps saying the thoughts in a funny voice, like in the voice of one of your favorite TV characters or maybe something that your children or a loved one laughs at can also be helpful in disrupting negative thoughts that keeps you from believing them.

You know, a lot of times some people might consider a movie they just saw and the main character was very poignant to them. So maybe saying the thought voice in a funny voice or different voice than that, you know, a voice that we all have at the back of
our head can kind of help us say, okay, this thought is not relevant. I don't believe it. It's just for comedy.

And lastly, you know, in terms of disrupting negative thoughts and reframing technique is the skill of just really moving forward anyway. A lot the times, you know, people do have the ability, based on their resiliency and inner strength, to recognize that they're having a negative thought and just be able to be mindful, to stay grounded, focused on the moment, and thereby not giving so much attention to that negative thought and moving forward throughout their day with whatever task that they have to accomplish. So in, you know, in summary, there are a lot of different ways to address, you know, negative thoughts and prevent them from coming into your awareness and, you know, thus, believing them.

So we have for you guys another quick survey that I'll pass back to Katie, which will really encourage you guys to participate in.

Thanks, Renae, and thanks again for sharing those first five strategies. I have gone ahead and sent the survey out to everyone. The question is, “Which of these five reframing techniques might look like you could try?” As Renae said, we all have different preferences, different personalities. One might work better, so take a minute to reflect on that and pick. If you had to pick, which one do you think might work well to you? So we'll go ahead and give folks a moment to do that. When you're done with that survey, you'll be able to go ahead and see where the other people who are participating in today's webinar, kind of where the group you know is scattered on this survey, you know, the different options that we have. So, again, thank you, Renae, and I'm going to go ahead and pass it back to you.

Thank you so much. I'm hopefully going to see some interesting results there on the survey. So we really want you guys to participate and take it. So in moving forward with looking at ways to prevent negative thoughts, there are mindfulness techniques. Some of these techniques include meditation or, you know, engaging in yoga, smiling, singing, surrounding yourself with positive people, and ensuring that you don't take on what's called a victim mentality. And so we'll talk a little bit more about some of these mindfulness techniques.

In some cases, medication or yoga can kind of be synonymous with each other. The practice of each is really about finding a place of inner calm with yourself in terms of being in the moment, you know, with all of your key senses, and really addressing that thought and looking at ways to utilize meditation or some, you know, yoga practices to help disrupt that thought. And a lot of times, yoga and meditation helps you really just focus on the moment, such as, you know, as I said, your senses, your breathing, and with that activity going on, you're less likely to focus on the negative thought that you're having.

So a lot of people are surprised by this, but smiling is definitely a mindfulness technique and can be helpful, just in general, to enhance our emotional wellbeing in the short
term. This is because smiling really helps improve a person's mood, and it also takes less muscles to smile than to frown, as our parents probably told us growing up. So when you are experiencing a negative thought, when you might be having a day where you're feeling a little more down than usual, try to just practice smiling.

And for some people, again, who might have, you know, other means or, you know, personal strengths such as, you know, singing or talent or being creative, music and singing in itself is a great way for us to express our feelings. It's been known as a great stress reliever. And, you know, it's not necessarily about if you have the greatest voice or not. I'm sure a lot of us have been in the shower or in the car singing our favorite song. You know, we attribute a lot of memories sometimes, or positive memories, to some things that we sing, so when you're having trouble with negative thoughts, you know, have a rough day with them, try singing, maybe even singing your favorite song, inside your head or out loud, and see if you can help relieve some of those negative emotions and help you not focus on those negative thoughts.

So, in terms of both a wellbeing factor and a social factor, surrounding yourself with positive people, you know, friends, coworkers, neighbors, people who can help you have a positive perspective on your current challenges or your current presentation, can definitely have a positive impact on your emotional wellbeing and helping you not focus on those negative thoughts, you know. I'm sure we've all been in the company of people sometimes who may have been experiencing their own challenges, and, as some people say, misery loves company. So even if you may not be as open to meditation or yoga or smiling or singing, try just surrounding yourself with people, you know, who care about your wellbeing and have a positive outlook, because it can help you in that manner as well.

So one last mindfulness technique that we mentioned before, and we'll explain it, is ensuring that you don't take on what's called a victim mentality. So, yes, of course, you know, we are put in situations sometimes that are out of our control, or we may just be having some emotional symptoms or negative thoughts in response to whatever stressor may be going on in our life. It's more important, really, to focus on reacting to that situation or stressor and exploring how to better cope with it than just to really focus on this has happened to me and succumbing to those negative thoughts, because from there, those negative emotional symptoms will come up, like anxiety or depression. So try really engaging in reframing or mindfulness techniques to keep you from focusing on what's happened and more so focusing on how to cope with it and disrupting those negative thoughts.

So, in addition, we do have other mindfulness techniques that can help prevent negative thoughts, and they include helping someone else, not dwelling or ruminating on your mistakes, so moving forward; reading positive quotes or remembering things that you're grateful for. So similar to, you know, surrounding yourself with positive people, it really helps us focus our mind on something else, other than negative thoughts, when we're able to help something else. Because it often makes them feel better, and that often, in turn, makes us feel better, whether we are, you know, appreciated, whether there's
gratitude, it helps take the focus off of what's going on with our wellbeing in terms of those negative thoughts and those emotional symptoms. So when experiencing negative thoughts, just try helping someone, something big or something small. You know, it's all the same, really, to kind of help you be mindful of not feeding into those negative thoughts.

So another thing that I think all of us can relate to at one time or another, is when we make mistakes, ruminating on what we've done, how it might have impacted us or someone else, the negative consequences, things of that nature. It's okay to process those things when we make a mistake, but we have to be mindful not to dwell on them, not to feed them too much of our mental energy, so to speak, and too much of our time, but focus on understanding why the mistake was made or why we made it, maybe how not to do such in the future, and then just moving forward, you know. Because when we dwell on things, it can bring about negative thoughts. So being mindful to, yes, allow us to process our mistakes but also ensuring that we're moving forward.

So similar to singing or perhaps, you know, having some social interaction by helping someone or being around positive people, reading positive quotes or keeping them nearby in your company can help prevent negative thoughts as well. A lot of times people can place positive quotes on their social media pages, around the house, the bathroom mirror the car to help remind them of, you know, being able to focus on something positive rather than the negatives to help better cope with preventing those negative thoughts. And, you know, some people say the more that you do that the more that you start to believe those quotes, and, thus, fighting off those negative thoughts.

So the last mindfulness technique that I'll share with you all today is to remember things that you're grateful for. Remembering things that you're grateful for really helps you focus on what you have to appreciate, and it helps take the focus off of those negative emotional symptoms or those negative thoughts.

So having shared some mindfulness techniques with all of you -- and we've done a few surveys before -- I want to really encourage all of you to actually maybe write down about five things that you're grateful for. You know, they could be anything in your life that you appreciate or anything, you know, maybe related to someone else that you know that you are actually grateful for. So really take some time out to explore this. And, you know, I'm sure the list is probably longer for some people, but maybe just writing down five things you're grateful for.

And from there, once you're finished, you know, actually start exploring, you know, what thoughts or feelings did you experience when making this list of things you're grateful for? What memories or thoughts perhaps came to the forefront of your mind before? So, essentially, now that we've looked at different reframing techniques and mindfulness techniques to help prevent negative thoughts, I want to encourage you all to consider one strategy that we've discussed thus far that you believe you can try the next time you have negative thoughts that comes to your mind.
So as we mentioned before, you know, there are obviously some really great coping skills, from, you know, medication or yoga or, you know, doing things that are positive for yourself, or for someone else, like singing, smiling, or helping someone else. But if you do come to realize that in dealing with, you know, negative thoughts you are trying to cope still with some anxiety or depressive symptoms that are perhaps increasingly negatively affecting you in terms of functioning in different areas of your life, if you need more assistance, there are still other treatment options available.

So typically in dealing with anxiety, depression, and negative thoughts, different treatment options can include psychotherapy, medication management, or complementary health approaches. So in psychotherapy, I do want to share that a very effective way to treat anxiety, and sometimes depressive symptoms, is a modality called "cognitive behavioral therapy." So perhaps if you needed more assistance with coping with anxiety, depression, and negative thoughts you could think out a counseling practitioner to give you some guidance with that modality, CBT, or cognitive behavioral therapy, to offer you more support.

Now, in some cases, some individuals do find medication management to be of assistance. This is important to ensure that the person who helps you with establishing a medication management regimen is a licensed medical practitioner, otherwise a prescribing practitioner, so that they can discuss with you the benefits, the risks, and side effects of any medication that they plan to prescribe you, how it can help you with you with your symptoms and things of that nature. Antianxiety medications or antidepressants may be appropriate, depending on what your symptoms are, you know, in they're mild, moderate, or severe, as mentioned before.

So, additionally, complementary health approaches, complementary and alternative approaches include stress and relaxation techniques, again, to include yoga, but also recreational activities, or even exercise. But, of course, again, be sure to check with your medical practitioner before beginning certain activities to make sure you're healthy enough to do so. And, of course, in addition, you know, aside from the aforementioned techniques, if you do need additional assistance, you can always contact your employee assistance program.

So, in summary, and having looked at, you know, disrupting negative thoughts, kind of defining what they are, what the sources for them are, and additional symptoms that can come along, to include anxiety and depressive symptoms, I want to just encourage you all to remember to just try to find positive coping skills, whether they're reframing or mindfulness techniques. So I'll just share with you a brief quote from the Dalai Lama, "See the positive side, the potential, and make an effort."

Thank you so much, Renae. I want to talk briefly about sessions and then pass it back to you. But, again, I want to thank you for your time, your expertise, for walking us all through a number of these strategies and encouraging us to pick one or two that we can go ahead and give a try to disrupt the negative thoughts in our lives, as well as, you know, should our symptoms maybe warrant seeking some additional treatment, perhaps
slipping into some anxiety or depression, so thanks for sharing all of that, a lot of great information.

If anyone does have any questions on today's topic, you are welcome to use the "Questions" featured. You should see that on the left-hand side of the page. You can simply type in any question in that section where it says "Ask a question," and send that to us. We'll receive that via e-mail, and then we'll go ahead and reply back to you via e-mail, usually within a day or two. It may take a couple more days depending on the nature of your question. But, generally, we'll get that to you as soon as possible.

Additionally, some of the frequently asked questions about certificates, you'll see that in an FAQs section, also on the left-hand side of your screen, as well as, once again, a copy of the slides and additional resource handout that we have there for you.

Finally, before I pass it back to Renae, I do want to just mention there's a brief survey when you log off. We always appreciate your feedback and suggestions and comments there, so thank you for your time with that. And just another big thank you again, Renae, for your time and expertise in walking us through this. So I'll go ahead and pass it back to you then, Renae, to go ahead and close us out.

Thanks very much, Katie. Well she covered everything pretty much that we have for you all. I want to thank you for engaging in the "Disrupting Negative Thoughts" webinar. And just remember moving forward in your own personal lives, there's a variety of different types of supports, coping skills, and techniques to address negative thoughts and any associated symptoms, so just be sure to always encourage yourself to try to cope with them on your own, as well as, you know, if you need further assistance, contact your doctor or engage in some of those other techniques that we discussed today. Thank you all very much.