

Letting go of unhelpful thoughts



The human mind is a wonderful thing. It helps to keep us safe and secure by solving problems and anticipating dangers and also helps us learn from past mistakes.

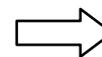
While this helps us to survive and thrive, it can also have a down side. In a bid to keep us safe, it sometimes keeps us from living fulfilling lives by drawing our attention to non-existent and often unlikely dangers. When the great "problem solving machine" goes into overdrive, it can result in obsessive **worry, anxiety, rumination**, and consequently a disconnection with what is happening **NOW** or a life lived in service of safety rather than fulfillment

By learning to be mindful of our thoughts and to view them more objectively, we can identify when thoughts are not helpful and therefore choose to act in more productive ways. **Cognitive fusion** describes our tendency to get 'fused' with or caught up with, our thoughts. When we're fused, we have no perspective on our thoughts, experience our lives through our thoughts and our thoughts control our behaviour. What follows is some defusion strategies ...

1. NOTICE



2. DEFUSE



3. CHOOSE

STEP 1. NOTICING

Before we can defuse from thoughts, we need to **be aware** of them. Mindfulness practice helps us to build awareness of our thoughts and reduce reactivity.

Once we are aware of our thoughts, we can decide if they are helpful or not. If they are not helpful, we can defuse ...

STEP 2. DEFUSION

Techniques to aid defusion or letting go include:

Asking yourself "is this thought helpful?" or "If I allow this thought to guide my actions, will it help me create the life I want?"

Thanking the mind. This acknowledges and accepts the presence of the thought (and that your mind is just trying to protect you), but also creates a space between you and the thought.

I'm having the thought that Replay a sticky thought in your mind preceded by "I notice I'm having the thought that" Most people get distancing using this technique.

Singing thoughts Humour can sometimes be helpful to defuse thoughts. Sing your thoughts in the tune of a playful song, such as Happy Birthday. This can help you remember that they are really just words in your head like the lyrics of a song.

Naming a story. If your thoughts retell a story over and over again, try *naming* the story. You can give it a novel or film title (e.g. *Mission Impossible*) or a character name (e.g. The Dark Lord). When that chain of thought arises you can defuse by naming it. "There is *Mission Impossible* again, I've seen that one many times, I think I'll put my attention and effort elsewhere!"

STEP 3. CHOICE

Now you have more perspective, bring yourself back to the present moment and choose a new behaviour in line with your values, goals or who you want to be in that moment!