

THOUGHT STOPPING

Irrational thinking usually underlies worrisome and unproductive thoughts. However, in the moment, when our thinking is getting in the way of productivity or social relationships, thought-stopping techniques can be used.

In a situation when you are worrying over and over about the same thing, you can stop it. Worrying in and of itself creates tension (or worse, anxiety), keeping the thought alive and exaggerating its importance.

How to "thought stop":

1. Shout "stop" inwardly (outwardly to practise or if you are on your own). Couple with a physical cue, such as digging nail into palm, or snapping a rubber band on your wrist. Repeat if old thoughts resurface.
2. Provide yourself with an immediate distraction, like getting up or moving your body, calling a friend, or doing something enjoyable. You will need to have that "something" prepared. Put your thoughts into a new channel, by calling upon a list of pleasurable thoughts and fantasies.

Practise thought-stopping by doing it 10 times per day. Deliberately bring on unpleasurable thoughts and then stop them by one of the above techniques. If your thoughts are self critical, finish off the exercise by thinking about a self-assertive statement. One cannot be anxious and assertive at the same time!

After thought-stopping has worked in the short term:

1. Identify the problem. If irrational thinking is at the root of your anxiety, identify the thinking errors and substitute the corresponding rational thoughts.
2. Outline all possible solutions you can employ both at present and in the future. Remember that the solution may or may not be within your control. Make note.
3. Make a time schedule for solution steps to be taken later.
4. Employ learned relaxation techniques.