



Cognitive defusion



We all have a tendency to over identify with our thoughts, amplifying them in our minds to the status of 'facts' and 'the truth'. When we become used to our thoughts in this way, the thoughts themselves can become over-controlling preventing us from seeing other options.



What can I do?

Learning to step back from thoughts

Cognitive defusion is about:

- looking at thoughts rather than from them
- noticing thoughts rather than getting caught up or buying into the thought
- letting thoughts come and go rather than holding onto the thought.

The purpose of cognitive defusion is to enable you to be aware of the actual process of your thinking so you are better able to reflect objectively and problem solve effectively before taking any action.

Practicing defusion

You can practice cognitive defusion in a number of different ways. Try practicing each of the techniques on the next page for 30 seconds each and see if your thought seems as powerful as it did when you began.

Cognitive defusion techniques

External voice

Instead of saying “I’m going to fail,” say, “I’m having the thought that I’m going to fail”, thereby creating some space between you and the thought.

Name the story

If all these thoughts and feelings were put into a movie titled “the something something story”, what would you call it? For example, “the I’m going to fail story” or the “no one likes my story”.

Type it out

Imagine your thought on a computer screen, then play with it by changing the font, colour and formatting.

Pop-up mind

Imagine that your unhelpful thought is like an internet pop-up ad. Practice closing the pop-up window.

Passengers on the bus

Imagine yourself driving a bus. Treat difficult thoughts as rowdy / annoying passengers. See if you can keep driving, rather than stopping when they want or trying to kick them off. Can you stay focused on driving your bus safely to your destination?

Say it slowly

Say the thought in slow motion. What do you notice about the power of the thought now? Is it as painful or uncomfortable as it was before you practiced this strategy?

Leaves on a stream

When the thought pops up, imagine placing it on a leaf on top of a gentle stream and watching as it disappears.

Thanking your mind

Next time an unhelpful thought pops into your head, try saying “thanks for that brain.” After all, your brain thinks it’s helping.

Carrying cards

Write difficult thoughts on small cards and carry them with you. It helps show you that you can carry your history without losing your ability to control your life.



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