

## **DEFUSION: Distancing yourself from negative & unhelpful thoughts**

Thoughts can be very powerful in generating negative & distressing feelings.

Distressing feelings can in turn be a strong driver for negative & unhelpful behaviours that inhibit us from achieving our goals & living our lives according to our values & priorities.

But consider :

*A thought is just a thought*

*Just because you think it doesn't mean it's:*

- *True*
- *Important*
- *Significant*
- *Real or*
- *Going to happen*

Our thoughts are not always *accurate* i.e. they are not always a true & correct interpretation of what is actually happening. Instead they represent our minds way of making sense out of what it sees. *So what actually is may not not be what our mind thinks it is.*

Our thoughts are not always *helpful* in that they don't assist us to behave in ways that help us to achieve our goals & follow our values.

Therefore it is useful to develop the ability to stop, step back & observe our thoughts to determine their accuracy or helpfulness. It makes sense to accept, listen to & follow those thoughts that are accurate & helpful & to reject those thoughts that are inaccurate & unhelpful. However.....

### ***Changing your thoughts is not so easy....nor is it always possible or necessary***

You don't tend to *deliberately or intentionally* think negatively. It tends to be automatic & habitual, a pattern that has developed & reinforced over time. Therefore it is not so easy to stop thinking in this way at will. In fact many people find that when they try to stop or change their negative thoughts they find it doesn't work &/or it only lasts in the short term i.e. the thoughts return & become even more potent in generating distressing feelings & behaviours. Furthermore many people say "I know my thoughts are inaccurate....but I can't stop thinking them or they feel true".

This is where learning to defuse from your negative & unhelpful thoughts can be useful. This allows you to step back & detach from your thoughts, giving you "room & space" to make more helpful & constructive choices that are in keeping with your values (i.e. what is important to you) & goals (i.e. what you want to achieve). In this way defusion from negative thoughts can help you to engage in behaviour that is self-enhancing rather than self-defeating.

You can learn to defuse from negative & unhelpful thoughts by drawing attention to the fact

that you are thinking.....that your mind (not you) is telling you ideas, opinions, beliefs, expectations, attributions, explanations, inferences, conclusions, assumptions.....stories.

### **How to defuse from negative thoughts**

Negative thoughts: *"I look ugly"*

*"No one could ever find me attractive"*

1. Stop
2. Step back
3. Take a deep breath
4. Consider:

*"Is this thought really helpful?"*

*"Is it going to benefit me in any way?"*

*"Is it going to help me achieve my goals?"*

*"Is it going to allow me to behave according to my values?"*

"The thought is not helpful. It makes me feel bad about myself & it lowers my confidence. When I listen to this thought I tend to avoid interacting with others or I become really quiet & unsociable. The chances of meeting someone when I act this way are pretty low. I want to meet someone & be in a relationship."

If the answer to these questions is YES.....then listen to the thought (fuse with it)

If the answer to these questions is NO..... then defuse from it by.....

5. Say to yourself:

***"I'm having the thought ..... I look ugly; No one will ever find me attractive"***

Repeat this at least 5 times

6. Say to yourself:

***"I'm noticing that I'm having the thought.....I look ugly:No one will ever find me attractive"***

Repeat this at least 5 times

7. **Label your "story"**. What theme or pattern are you noticing here? Is this thought similar to other thoughts you often think over & over again? Does this thought represent a recurring message or story that your mind often tells you?

*"This is my .....I will never find a partner story"*

*"This is my .....I am ugly story"*

*"This is my .....I will be alone forever story"*

8. **Consider what possible *mistakes* in thinking you are making?** We all make mistakes in what we think. We all make assumptions that aren't true or jump to conclusions that prove to be incorrect. It is a long-standing human tradition to get things wrong!!! Are you:

- *Mind reading*: claiming to know what people think about you?
- *Fortune telling*: predicting the future to be disastrous?
- *Personalising*: relating everything that happens back to you?
- *Negative filtering*: focussing on the negative & ignoring the positive?
- *Overgeneralising*: applying one instance to all other instances?
- *Catastrophising*: blowing things out of proportion/exaggerating how bad it is?
- *Black & White thinking*: seeing things in extremes e.g. all good or all bad?

Say to yourself:

"I am fortune telling, catastrophising & using black & white thinking".

9. **Musical thoughts:** If you consider:

- thoughts are just thoughts
- they are not always accurate
- they are not always helpful
- they can be habitual negative stories our minds tell us repeatedly
- they are often errors in the way our mind sees reality

then changing the way we relate to them can help us to be less distressed by them. It may sound ridiculous but try singing your thoughts to the tune of Happy Birthday, Jingle Bells, the current number 1 song on the music charts.....any song you like.....& see what happens.

Do you find that they seem less serious & intense? Do you feel less affected by them? You will find that by changing the tone in which you see the thoughts, the effect & impact that it has on you is marked!!!

Remember:

- Defusion can help you to distance yourself from negative thoughts & feelings & help you to break habitual, self-defeating patterns in behaviour by allowing you the space, room & opportunity to choose to act in a self-enhancing & constructive way
- Defusing from negative thoughts & feelings does not necessarily mean you will get rid of these thoughts in feelings. This is not the goal of the defusion
- Defusion helps you to learn to relate differently to negative thoughts & feelings & to not be so driven & guided by them
- Defusion is simple in theory....but requires practice in order for it to be effective!!!