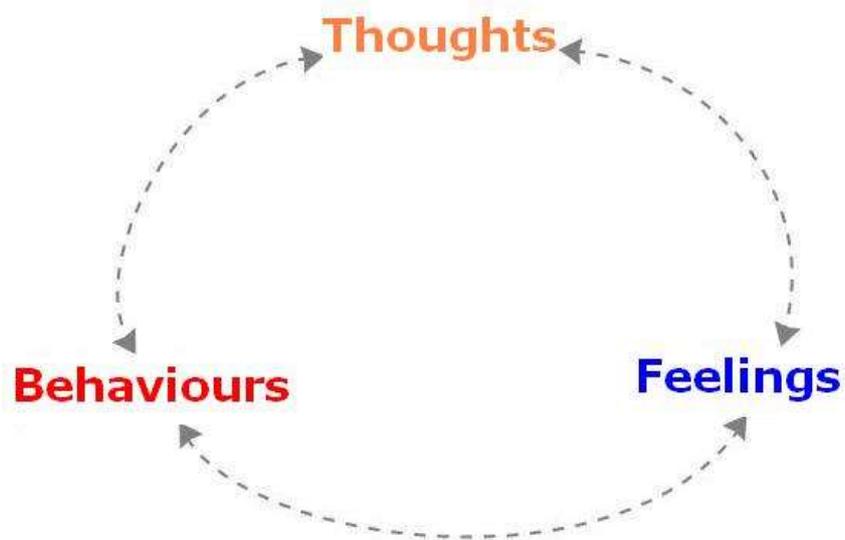


An Introductory Self-Help Course in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy

Step Five



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Step 5

Challenging our Thoughts



Having learned that thoughts are just thoughts, that they're automatic, not necessarily true, habitual and just appear believable, then we can behave like Victim 2 in the previous step and learn to challenge our thoughts.

We can start by identifying which of our thoughts is the HOT thought:

Write down several thoughts from a recent distressing situation. What did those thoughts say about you, or mean to you? Of all those, which thought (or images) was the one that made you most upset?

Let's take that hot thought - THE thought that contributed most to making you feel distressed or depressed. Ask yourself the following questions about THAT thought:



- Is this thought a fact, or my opinion?
- What am I reacting to? What meaning am I giving this situation?
- Is there another way of looking at it?
- What would someone else make of it? It's often helpful to think about a particular person who you respect, and imagine what they would think about that thought, what meaning they would give it, and how they would react to it.
- What advice would I give someone else?
- Is this one of those [Unhelpful Thinking Habits](#)?
- Is my reaction in proportion to the actual event?
- How important is this really? How important will it be in a year's time?
- How am I reacting? When I think of that Playground Bully, am I like Victim 1 (believing and getting upset), or can I be like Victim 2 and challenge the bully?
- What if I tried to see this situation as an outside observer. How would that look? Would things be likely to have a different meaning?
- What evidence is there that this thought is true?
- What evidence is there that this thought isn't true (partly or totally)?
- What would be a more balanced way of looking at it?
- What is the bigger picture?

Use these sheets repeatedly to learn to challenge your thoughts successfully (photocopy the sheets and use them at least once daily):

- ❖ **The Court Case or the Thought Record Sheet**
- ❖ **Positive Affirmations**
- ❖ You might also find **The Worry Tree** helpful

The Court Case



Write down your thought/s – put the really troublesome (hot) thought (not you!) in the “dock”, the thought that makes you feel really bad or upset. (To help identify this thought, ask yourself questions such as: What’s the worst that could happen? What does that say about me?)

Look for evidence to support the accuracy of the thoughts – what tells you this thought is true? What would a barrister / lawyer / advocate for the defence say? (Remember this is a “court case” and evidence should be able to stand up in court as facts)



Look for evidence against the thoughts – what tells you this thought is not totally true, all of the time? What would a barrister / lawyer / advocate for the prosecution say? What factual evidence is there? Consider what others would say (witnesses) etc.

Sum up all the evidence and come to your own conclusions – **find a closing statement that is based on the evidence, a summing-up statement that is realistic, rational and balanced.** Rephrase the original thought in a way that includes the evidence. (You might start with: “Even though I.....”)



Thought Record Sheet

| Situation | Emotions / Moods (rate 0 – 100%) | Physical sensations | Unhelpful Thoughts / Images | Alternative / realistic thought More balanced perspective | What I did / What I could do / Defusion technique / What's the best response? Re-rate Emotion 0-100% |
|--|--|--|---|---|--|
| <p><i>What happened? Where? When? Who with? How?</i></p> | <p><i>What emotion did I feel at that time? What else? How intense was it?</i></p> | <p><i>What did I notice in my body? Where did I feel it?</i></p> | <p><i>What went through my mind? What disturbed me? What did those thoughts/images/memories mean to me, or say about me or the situation? What am I responding to? What 'button' is this pressing for me? What would be the worst thing about that, or that could happen?</i></p> | <p><i>STOPP! Take a breath.... Is this fact or opinion? What would someone else say about this situation? What's the bigger picture? Is there another way of seeing it? What advice would I give someone else? Is my reaction in proportion to the actual event? How important is this?</i></p> | <p><i>What could I do differently? What would be more effective? Do what works! Act wisely. What will be most helpful for me or the situation? What will the consequences be?</i></p> |

Positive Affirmations

Over the years, we tend to get into **unhelpful thinking habits**, and think negatively about ourselves and situations. Using positive statements can help us develop a new attitude to ourselves and our situations.



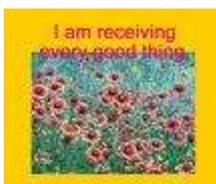
Choose a statement from those below, or make one that means more to you, and repeat, repeat, repeat throughout the day, every day, of every week, of every month. You might want to make or print out a card with your affirmation, and carry it with you. For the positive affirmations to work, you must use it whenever you notice you have that negative thought – immediately turn it around by using your affirmation.

Use a statement that starts with “I” and use the present tense. See the examples below – choose one, adapt one, or make up your own. Make it something broadly realistic, even if you don’t believe it right now.



- ❖ I am strong
- ❖ I have strength
- ❖ I am determined and successful
- ❖ I am a good and worthwhile person
- ❖ I am a unique and special person
- ❖ I have inner strength and resources
- ❖ I am confident and competent

- ❖ I hold my head up high
- ❖ I look good because I am good
- ❖ People like me – I am a likeable person and I like myself
- ❖ I care about others, I am needed and worthwhile
- ❖ I am a loving person
- ❖ I have a lot to be proud of
- ❖ I have all that I need
- ❖ I am in control of my life
- ❖ I can achieve anything I want to achieve
- ❖ I make wise decisions based on what I know
- ❖ I have set my goals and am moving towards them
- ❖ I accept myself as a unique and worthwhile person
- ❖ My life has meaning and purpose
- ❖ I am in control of my choices
- ❖ I am strong and healthy



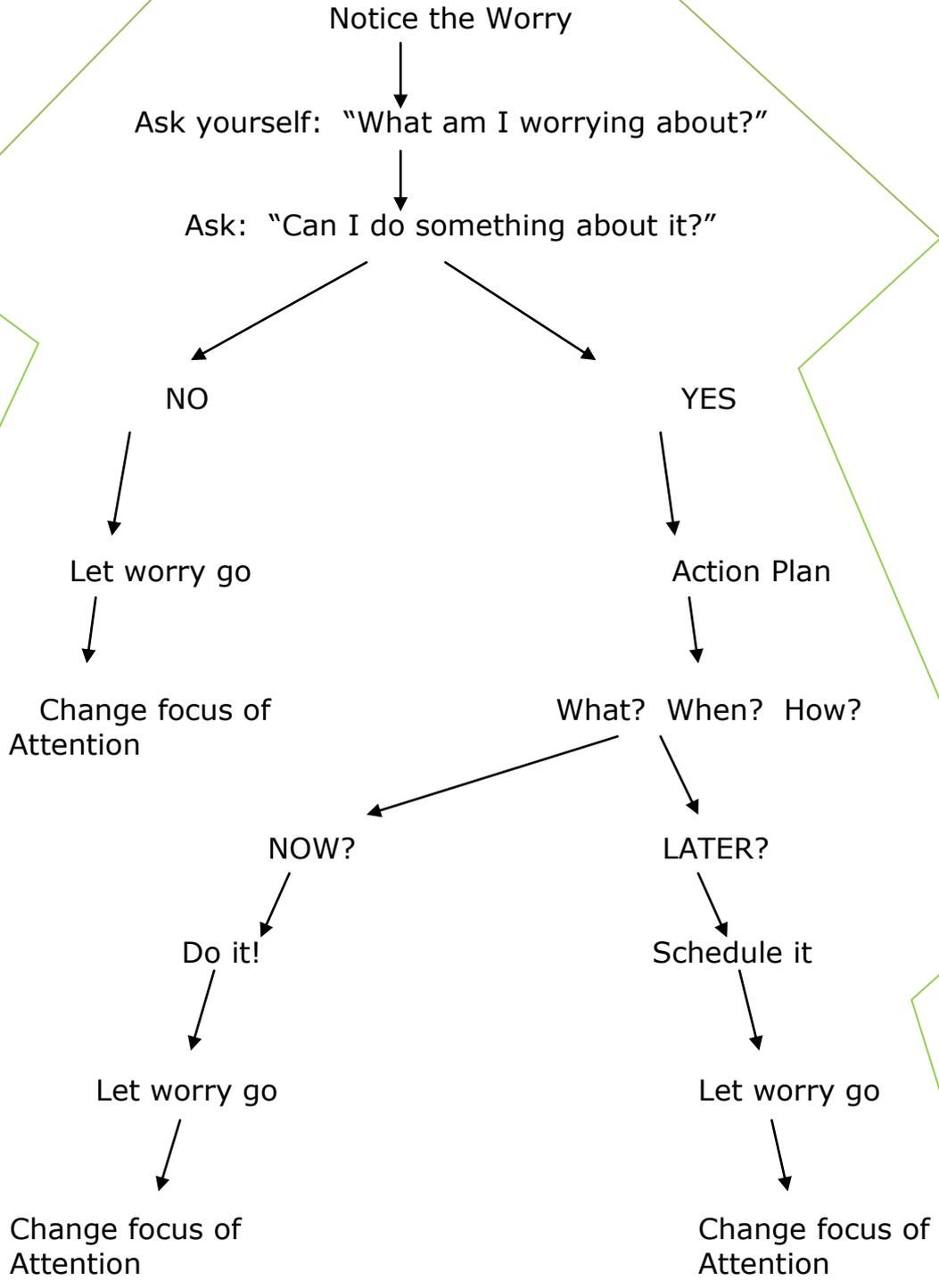
- ❖ I am calm and confident
- ❖ I have many options and can make wise decisions
- ❖ Everything is getting better every day
- ❖ I am calm and relaxed
- ❖ I am healthy and have all that I need
- ❖ Today is the first day of the rest of my life and I will take

notice of the many positive things this day has to offer

- ❖ I live a healthy and positive lifestyle
- ❖ I know I can master anything if I practise it continually
- ❖ I have my wise mind – I can seek inner guidance whenever I need to
- ❖ My life purpose can be whatever I choose it to be
- ❖ All is well, right here, right now



THE WORRY TREE



STOPP Worksheet

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Notice the intrusive or distressing thought, image, memory, trigger...</p> | <p><i>Write your reactions and alternative, healthier responses in this column. What works for you? What will help? What can you tell yourself? What do you need to remember at those times?</i></p> |
| <p>STOPP!</p>  | |
| <p>Take a breath</p>  | |
| <p>Observe – describe the feelings, images, thoughts, body sensations, triggers.</p>  | |
| <p>Pull back / Put in some Perspective. What's the bigger picture? Take the helicopter view. Is this fact or opinion? How would someone else see this? Is there another way of looking at this?</p>  | |
| <p>Practice what works. What is the best thing to do right now – for me, for others, for the situation.</p>  | |

In Step 6 we will learn to distance or defuse our minds from our thoughts. We learn that thoughts are NOT statements of fact, and that we do not have to react to them at all. We learn defusion techniques including mindfulness.

If you need help with Step Five, please see this page for individual and personal support from the author, an accredited CBT Therapist: www.get.gg/selfhelpassist.htm

If printing out the whole self-help course, you can dispose of the Step Five cover page (page 37), and replace this page (44) with the first page (44) of Step Six