

## ***THOUGHT STOPPING Rx.***

### ***"Prescription to Keep Thinking on Track"***

Here is a strategy you will find very useful practising.

#### **Part 1**

#### **Thought stopping is:**

- Process by which you are able to cease dwelling on a bothersome thought.
- Substitution of a healthy thought for an unhealthy thought.
- Procedure used to stop thoughts that are cues to acting impulsively or compulsively.
- Process by which you are able to break the power of the cues that lead you into addictive or binge-like behaviour.
- Act of deliberately turning to cues that break unhealthy patterns or habits.
- Ability to discontinue obsessing on an idea, image, thought, fear or stimuli that is a cue for unhealthy behaviour.
- Practice of using mental energy in a positive way.
- Technique used to reduce the negative impact of stress, unhealthy emotional cues, and fears.
- Stress-reduction technique that eliminates the overwhelming impact of stress and/or crisis events.

#### **Use one, or a combination, of the following:**

- Break an obsessive, unhealthy thought pattern by substituting a healthy thought pattern.
- Divert or detour your mind from unhealthy or negative thoughts.
- Clear your mind of all unnecessary and unhealthy thoughts that create stress or cues for acting out in unhealthy ways.
- Replace one thought for another, i.e., the thought of eating is replaced by the thought of exercising.
- Hear "stop" literally or figuratively whenever a negative or unhealthy thought arises, e.g., the desire for a cigarette appears and "stop" is immediately heard.
- Replace a negative or unhealthy image with a positive visual image.

## **Thought stopping techniques:**

**Thought Replacement:** when an unwanted thought enters, immediately replace the thought with a healthy, rational one.

**Substituting a Healthy Thought Pattern:** if you have a tendency to think irrationally due to irrational beliefs, you can develop a rational pattern of thinking by challenging every thought that comes to mind, asking: 'Is this a rational thought?' If not, 'What is irrational about it?' 'What would be a rational replacement for this thought?'

**Replacement Visual Image:** if you have a tendency to visualize negative images, replace these negative images by positive, healthy images.

**Yelling 'Stop':** on thinking the unwanted thought, immediately yell 'Stop.' The yell can be out loud or only in the mind. Continue to yell 'Stop' until the unwanted thought ceases.

**Aversive Replacements:** if you have a tendency to think of an unhealthy behaviour in an acceptable manner, immediately replace these acceptable images with more honest images, i.e., thoughts of alcohol, drugs, junk food can be replaced by the words 'poison,' 'unhealthy,' 'disgusting,' 'barf' or 'killers.' Thoughts of cigarettes can be replaced by 'cancer sticks' or 'coffin nails.'

## **Irrational thinking which blocks thought stopping work:**

- It's okay if I just think about it and do nothing about it.
- What's the harm of thinking about it?
- People will never know if I just think about it for a little while.
- I've denied myself so much, why can't I just think about it once in a while?
- You can't condemn me for thinking.
- I never thought about it before I acted, so why should I avoid thinking about it now?
- It is too much of a battle to fight these thoughts. It's easier to give in and then start over again in the morning.
- What difference does it make if I think about it?
- It seems so silly to control my mind from having thoughts about it.
- This feels like brainwashing and I think brainwashing is bad.
- I don't have time to do this.
- I don't need this in order to be successful in achieving recovery.
- This is a far-out psychological gimmick, too stupid to try.

(Source: Messina & Messina)

## How To Thought Stop: A Technique to Cope with Ruminative Thoughts

Loop-thoughts, repeated bothersome unnecessary thoughts (rumination), can occur at any time to anybody. We all get stressed when we have to cope with difficult situations, but there are techniques you can use that will result in stress reduction, and this technique is a great coping strategy. Use this technique when you are under stress and begin to find yourself thinking about a situation or have concerns that keep repeating over and over with no resolution.

### Here's how:

1. Background to the Technique. In this instance it is repeated, unnecessary, bothersome thoughts that you are trying to stop. So, first you have to recognise the symptoms of stress. Next, you have to believe that your thinking can both block or promote your ability to cope. Coping strategies involve restructuring your thoughts. The technique is really quite straight forward and an effective treatment.
2. The Technique. When you find yourself ruminating, yell 'Stop.' But, as shouting out loud can cause you a few social problems, try shouting (thinking) 'Stop' to yourself. You may look a little odd as you scrunch up your eyes or stare madly into the distance, but if it works...
3. When the Same Thought(s) Return. Some thoughts will often keep repeating themselves like some awful catchy tune. Keep trying the silent shout 'Stop' technique. You should find you are able to control unwanted, useless thoughts. This is not a home-baked technique; it is an effective cognitive coping strategy suggested widely by Psychologists.
4. If the Technique Doesn't Succeed. If the treatment doesn't work you can tap or bang on a table if you find it makes you more aware of the thoughts. People sometimes find a noise promotes the 'Stop' thought. If you decide you need to stop the thought with a noise, it is best used when you are alone. Once you get used to recognising the thoughts you want to stop, go back to the shouting 'Stop' technique loudly, but silently, to yourself.

### Tips:

Perfect practice makes perfect, and it may not take you too long to get to grips with the thought stopping techniques. Thought stopping is a great coping strategy and treatment. Any method that contributes to a happier life is worth trying...

(Source: Kennard)

From: Dr John Barletta MAPS  
Clinical Psychologist  
Level 1, Suite 2  
3 Days Rd, Grange 4051  
☎ 3356 4400  
john@johnbarletta.com  
www.johnbarletta.com