

Thought-Stopping:

an Antidote for Stress



Throughout our mind flows a constant level of activity, thoughts, worries, perceptions, and information, which can be thought of as "internal noise." Sometimes we need to interrupt this flow of noise. A technique called thought-stopping can be used to interrupt a chain of persistent, nagging thoughts.

Steps in Thought-Stopping

Follow these directions to learn how to stop nagging thoughts:

Step 1

- Say to yourself "stop" or shout "stop" out loud if you are alone.
- Imagine the word "stop" in the form of a large red stop sign or billboard or in flashing neon lights.
- Keep hearing "stop" shouted in your mind.

Step 2

- Now inhale, and when you exhale, say the word "calm" to yourself.
- Let your muscles relax if you can, and imagine a pleasant scene such as lying on a warm, sandy beach or watching a sunset.

Step 3

- Repeat the cycle of "stop" and "calm" several times in order to break the chain of thought.
- Each time you repeat stop, say it louder, shouting if necessary.
- As you do this, you will find that while the original thought may return, it will begin to elicit the "stop" image earlier in the chain.

Applying Thought-Stopping to Your Daily Activities

- Once you have mastered the thought-stopping technique, you are ready to apply it throughout your daily activities.
- Now as you carry out the basic steps, you will be saying "stop" inside of your head instead of out loud.
- Use this technique whenever you become aware of a worry or a thought that is producing anxiety.
- After you have said "stop" to yourself, think of a pleasant thought or situation that will help you to relax.
- It is important to follow these steps every time and as soon as a negative thought appears. If you do not, the thought preoccupation will become stronger and more difficult to stop.
- Frequent repetition of this technique will help you develop your thought-stopping habit. Practice it consistently so that it enters your skills repertoire and you will be able to stop disturbing thoughts.