



UPPER ISLAND ASSESSMENT AND RESOURCE SERVICE

MANAGING OUR THINKING

There are a number of strategies for overcoming negative or destructive patterns of thinking. Listed below you will find descriptions of five methods that have been known to help.

SIMPLE AWARENESS

Many of our thoughts occur without our awareness. They happen automatically. They can be habitual or triggered by our surroundings. Ask yourself five, 10, 20 or even 50 times a day; "What am I thinking about?" Often, just becoming aware of what we are thinking about can immediately stop the thinking pattern that is going on. If you find yourself becoming upset, worried, etc., ask the question; "What have I been thinking about?"

THOUGHT STOPPING

Thought stopping is designed to be used when you catch yourself worrying about the same issue over and over again. It would only be used when the worry is pointless. If your worrying is actually giving you solutions to the problem, you might want to keep it. Thought stopping could also be used to stop a particular thought process that is not helpful, ie. dwelling on the "what if" or other kinds of thinking that is not constructive at the time.

The way it works is like this; once you become aware of what you are thinking about, and want to stop this thinking pattern, stand up, clap your hands, shake your head, and shout "Stop". You may feel quite silly doing this, but try it anyway. If the thought returns, repeat the technique. Eventually, you may get to a point where all you have to do is imagine yourself shouting "stop".

THOUGHT CHALLENGING

Sometimes simple awareness and thought stopping are not enough. You may have to argue with your negative thoughts. Talk back to yourself in a way that challenges what you have been thinking. It generally will not work if you do not believe or trust what you are saying to yourself. Be realistic. Examine your negative thoughts. Ask yourself if there have been times when this kind of situation has happened in the past, and what did you do to cope that time. Respond to your negative thoughts with statements that seem more balanced and true.

STICK TO THE FACTS

It is not enough to just come up with the more balanced view. You may have to repeat the truth to yourself over and over again. Stick to the facts (what do you know to be true about your situation?) Do not allow yourself to go down any road of negative thinking that is not based on facts or truth. Stop yourself by saying, "I am not going down that road", "Spending time thinking about that will not be helpful".

And lastly,

CHANGE YOUR ENVIRONMENT

Much of our thought processes are automatic and often connect to our senses or environment. If you are sitting in a chair in your living room and catch yourself thinking about a train of thoughts that you would like to stop, get up out of the chair, leave the room, go for a walk, make yourself a sandwich, log onto the computer to check your e-mails, call a friend, walk the dog, etc. Usually within two to 3 minutes our thought processes will change.

Sometimes you may have to repeat all five methods, sometimes over and over. Sometimes just simple awareness makes enough difference. Usually we find one or two methods work best and all we have to do is repeat these techniques.

Parts of this article adapted from the Changeways Program, Department of Psychology, Vancouver Hospital and Health Sciences Centre, UBC Pavilion