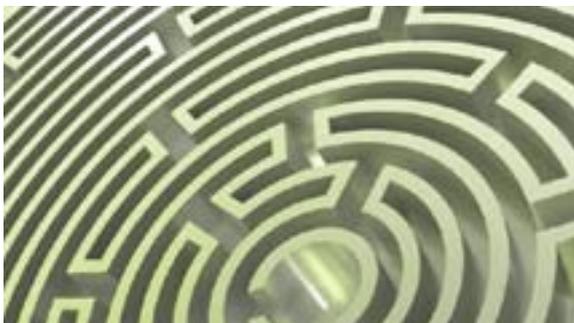


Recognising Unhelpful Thinking (2) – Thought Stopping & Rumination



What is thought stopping or rumination? Many people try to deal with their extreme and unhelpful thoughts by using two main strategies. These are both ineffective and can backfire. People often either try not to think about the thoughts (THOUGHT STOPPING) or try and think too much about them – by analysing the issue in detail to the exclusion of other things (RUMINATION).

It's easy to understand why we would try so hard to rid ourselves of these extreme and unhelpful thoughts, but important to realise that these two techniques are not useful in doing this.

1). Trying hard not to think about things.

Because worrying thoughts focus on topics that are distressing you may try hard not to think about the thoughts. Is this an effective strategy?

Try this experiment with your guide or with a friend or other helper.

Experiment:

In order to see if trying hard not to think worrying thoughts works, try this practical experiment. Please hold this picture in front of you and try as hard as you can for the next 30 seconds not to think about the polar bear.



Related leaflets include:

- > Changing Unhelpful Thinking (1), (2) and (3)
- > Completing Your Own 5 Areas Review

- > A Guide to Using Self Help Leaflets
- > Recognising Unhelpful Thinking (1)



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Contd.

After you have done this, think about what happened. Was it easy not to think about the bear, or did it take a lot of effort? You may have noticed that trying hard not to think about it actually made it worse. Alternatively, you may have spent a lot of mental effort trying hard to think about something else such as a black polar bear instead. For many people, trying hard to ignore their upsetting thoughts and not think about them doesn't work and may actually worsen the problem. This can be mentally exhausting.

If you think this only applies to you or even that this is not relevant, why not ask a friend or family member to try the experiment too. Experiments can be a really important way of testing out new ideas.

Most people find that, the harder they try not to think about something, the more they think about it. Thoughts feed on attention and it doesn't matter whether you are trying hard to think about them, or trying hard not to think about them – the end result is the same in that you are giving the thought attention and keeping it in the front of your mind.

2. Rumination: going-over the same things again and again in your mind.

A second common response is to try to think your way out of the situation by over-analysing any concerns in great detail. The result is that the same spiral of thoughts goes round and round in your head. However this approach also isn't usually effective. It is far more effective to just let the thoughts be. Don't get caught up in them and accept that you have these worries and that you cannot think your way through them. Dwelling or

ruminating on the thoughts usually just makes them stronger or seem worse or truer than they actually are, and helpful thoughts or behaviours are ignored.

Your *guide* can help you to identify if either of these unhelpful thinking styles applies to you. This might involve you keeping a diary of your thinking over the next few days to see if you can spot whether you are trying to stop your thoughts or ruminating on them. If you keep a diary, try also to record the situations when you notice these unhelpful thinking styles, what effect these thoughts had on your moods or feelings and behaviour, and what happened in the end. You can design your own diary or your guide can give you one.

REMEMBER: Thoughts are NOT facts. Thoughts can be changed. Some thoughts are easier to change than others. Not all unhelpful thoughts have to be changed before you can start to feel better. Nobody is perfect, neither is change – you cannot always change your thoughts or make them stay changed. Just because the old thoughts still hang around doesn't mean you have to give them any attention or act on them – it is OK just to let them be.

