

Cognitive defusion

Our feelings generally arise from the thoughts we have. When our thoughts are especially hurtful, the feelings that result can be pretty difficult. If you can create some distance from your thoughts, however, they quickly lose their impact. This gives you the opportunity to reframe them somewhat, lessening both their power and the feelings they create.

This approach is called “cognitive defusion” (Beck, 1979) and here are some techniques.



Leaves on a stream

Imagine standing near a stream in the autumn. Place the thoughts that hurt your feelings on the leaves that float by. Watch the leaves disappear in the distance, taking your thoughts with them.

Noticing your feelings

Take a step back from your difficult feelings and notice them for what they are. Say, “I notice I’m feeling anxious.” You can even “notice that you’re noticing” to make the distance even greater.



Bad news radio

Imagine all your hurtful thoughts are playing on their own dedicated radio station. What would happen if you turned the dial to a new station, leaving the old one behind?

Say it slowly

Say your difficult thoughts out loud, but say them as slowly as you possibly can. Then say them again. And again. What happens to your thoughts as you keep repeating them in this manner?



Type it out

Imagine typing your difficult thoughts into your computer. Now start playing with the fonts, colours and formatting options of the text you just typed.

Passengers on the bus

Imagine your hurtful thoughts are annoying passengers on a bus, and you are the driver. Can you keep your focus on the road and tune them out?

