

I'M HAVING THE THOUGHT THAT ...

- Put your negative self-judgment into a short sentence—in the form “I am X.” For example, *I'm a loser* or *I'm not smart enough*.
- Now fuse with this thought for ten seconds. In other words, get all caught up in it and believe it as much as you possibly can.
- Now silently replay the thought with this phrase in front of it: “I’m having the thought that ...” For example, *I'm having the thought that I'm a loser*.
- Now replay it one more time, but this time add this phrase “I notice I’m having the thought that ...” For example, *I notice I'm having the thought that I'm a loser*.

What happened? Did you notice a sense of separation or distance from the thought? If not, run through the exercise again with a different thought. This is a nice simple exercise (adapted from Hayes et al., 1999) that gives an experience of defusion to almost everyone.

In a therapy session, you could follow up as below:

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Therapist: So what happened to the thought?

Client: It sort of lost some of its sting.

Therapist: Did you get some sense of separation or distance from it?

Client: Yeah. It sort of backed off a bit.

Therapist: Could you just show me with your hands and your arms where the thought seemed to move to?

Client: Out here. (*The client stretches his arms out in front of his chest.*)

Therapist: So that's part of what we mean by defusion: you start to separate from your thoughts and give them some space to move around in.

You could follow up in other ways too. For example, you could ask the client, “I wonder if you'd be willing to try talking this way in our sessions. Suppose you have some sort of distressing, painful, or unhelpful thought like *This is all too hard*. When you have a thought like that, could you say to me, “I'm having the thought that this is all too hard?”

Once this convention is established, you can come back to it again and again and play with it as a brief intervention. Here are two examples:

Client: I can't handle this.

Therapist: So you're having the thought that you can't handle this.

Therapist: Could you say that again, but this time, preface it with “I'm having the thought that ...”

Client: I'm having the thought that I'm a stupid idiot.

Therapist: Did you notice any difference?

Client: Yes, it didn't bother me so much the second time.

Of course, you can use this technique with feelings and urges too: “I'm having a feeling of anxiety” or “I'm having the urge to run away.”