

## Thought Control Techniques

### Now Awareness

This is a technique developed by a twelve step program. It is used by its participants to change thoughts about habits and addictions. The procedure works because it puts time and space between you and your original self-talk. Any distraction might result in us forgetting about what we were thinking or doing. This technique has the same result as a natural distraction.

#### Steps

1. An unpleasant or unwanted thought occurs.
2. Distract yourself by saying out loud the words, “Now I am aware of \_\_\_\_\_.” Complete the sentence by naming objects that you can actually see like, “Now I am aware of the door; now I am aware of the pencil holder; now I am aware of the picture; now I am aware of the carpet; now I am aware of the desk; now I am aware of the telephone.”
3. Continue repeating the expression and naming things in your immediate surroundings. You can repeat things you have already mentioned. Should the thought return, repeat the procedure.

One can also choose to focus on a single item rather than multiple items.

### Thought Stopping

This technique was developed to stop recurring or compulsive thoughts. It has been used to correct self-defeating thoughts, too. The technique utilizes the startle response. We experience this when we are deep in thought and someone startles us by saying something or making a loud noise. When you try to return to your thought, it becomes difficult.

**Steps – Verbal Version**

1. An unpleasant thought occurs.
2. Close your eyes and focus on the thought.
3. Count to three.
4. Yell the word “STOP” as loud as you can.
5. Pair a behavior such as pulling your earlobe, scratching your head, or pinching yourself along with the yelling. This enhances the technique over time because we begin to associate that behavior with effective thought stopping.
6. Repeat the procedure if the thought reoccurs.

**Steps – Silent Version**

This version is to be used in situations where you don't want to be obvious about doing the technique. This is effective only after conditioning yourself with the verbal version several times.

1. An unpleasant thought occurs.
2. Close your eyes and focus on the thought.
3. Count to three.
4. Imagine yelling “STOP” or imagine the word STOP! in large red letters, picture a flashing red light, see a STOP sign.
5. Pull your earlobe, scratch your head, or pinch yourself as you imagine yelling “STOP.”

### Thought Zapper

This technique involves the use of mild physical punishment when unwanted self-talk occurs. It is based upon a very simple behavior change concept – any behavior that is followed by a punishment will occur less often. This technique is very effective when combined with thought stopping.

#### Steps

1. Place an elastic or rubber band around your wrist.
2. You decide to stop your current self-talk because you decide it is unnecessary and not realistic at the present moment. Perhaps it is creating what you believe to be distress. You choose to spend less time and emotional energy with a belief about a certain person, place, or thing. You choose to be in control.
3. Give yourself a zap by pulling a rubber or elastic band.
4. Repeat as necessary.