

Section III: Special Skills

Chapter 6: Over-thinking

Geri is a 67 year old woman who is caring for her 76 year old husband with Alzheimer's Disease. She is currently doing well in a program of cognitive-behavioral therapy, but she finds that there are certain thoughts that stay with her longer than she would like. For example, after a tiring day of taking care of her husband's personal needs, Geri often starts a process of over-thinking, or excessive worry, where her beliefs & concerns seem hopeless. Geri often wonders "There's nothing I can do about getting my house cleaned, what will I do? How can I afford all of our these medical bills on our fixed income?"

Cognitive-behavioral therapy clearly emphasizes attending to how you are thinking, but excessive thinking can lead to another problem. Sometimes people can't put some thoughts, especially worries, out of their minds as quickly as others. As you learn new ways to think through your problems, you may find that some thoughts might stay with you longer than you'd want or they will not respond to the kinds of skills that you have already mastered.

How can I tell I am over thinking?

One sign of over thinking or "worrying" occurs when a thought or a set of thoughts stay with you without any clear solution. Worrying involves "stuck" thoughts that may also cause you to feel more anxious or sad instead of feeling better. Sometimes after worrying you may come up with a solution, but the time you spent may keep you from thinking about other important things. Ask yourself "Have I ever thought so much about one thing that I forgot other important things?" If so, it may be time to introduce a couple of new tools.

Thought Stopping

This technique involves actively halting the worries you're having and moving to thoughts about other things. Once you recognize that you are worrying, say "Stop!" to yourself or out loud. This may feel very unusual at first but it can be very effective. You can also try saying (to yourself or out loud) "I am thinking about (your worry) right now, instead I want to think about (new thought)." Repeat the new thought to yourself several times or work it out with a UTD until you feel more in control.

For example, if Geri was "worrying" about her husband's laundry when she needed to take time for herself, she might say "Stop! I am worrying about my husband's laundry right now. Instead I want to think about my grandson's birthday gift. He said he wanted a baseball glove." Are there any topics or situations that cause you to over-think? Briefly describe the situations and their corresponding beliefs below.

Situation/ Topic	"Worry" Thoughts

Exercise

1. Pick one situation/topic and start to think about it and yell out "STOP!" after about 10 seconds. Did you startle yourself? If you did, you have started to redirect your attention in order to either concentrate on this matter in a different way, or think about something else entirely.

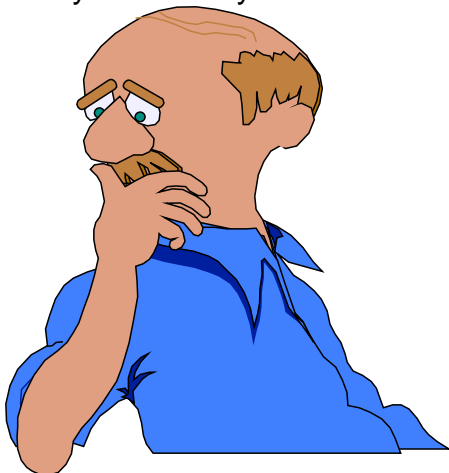
2. Now, take that "worry" thought and try to write it out by attending to what you would rather be thinking about.

Stop! I am worrying about _____, but I'd rather be thinking about_____.

After you have filled in the information pertinent to your example, say it out loud a few times to get a sense of what it feels like.

Worry Time

Sometimes people feel better after they have worried about things a little. The act of thinking can help you feel better, but worrying can also eat up time that you'd rather spend on other things. "Worry time" is a scheduled time during the day to focus your worrying. When worries come up during the day, write them down on a "worry list" and avoid thinking about them for the moment. Schedule some time every day to look at your list and really think about the worries on the list. *Limit the time* to a specific amount, and stick to this time limit by planning something to do at the end of your worry time. We suggest that you set a kitchen timer whose sound will mark the end of "worry time," and remind you to shift your attention.



For example, plan thirty minutes in the evening to worry right before your favorite television show. Look at the items on your list and think about each one, but stop as soon as your show starts. Many people find this technique helpful, although it may feel a little strange at first.

Summary and Review

What were the key points brought up in this chapter?

- 1. _____

- 2. _____

- 3. _____

What skills did I learn?



- 1. _____

- 2. _____

- 3. _____

What assignments might help me practice these skills?

- 1. _____

- 2. _____

- 3. _____

Additional thoughts or questions I have about this material.