

12 thought stopping

for you to know

Thought stopping is a technique that can help you let go of thoughts that cause you to feel anxious and change them to thoughts that help you feel peaceful.

Kaitlyn worried about her father. In his new job, he had to travel a lot and he was flying in airplanes twice as often as he used to. Kaitlyn had always been a little afraid of flying, and now she found herself waking up in the middle of the night thinking about her dad's safety. Her thoughts raised her anxiety level, and then she had a hard time going back to sleep. She also found herself thinking anxious thoughts about her dad when she was supposed to be concentrating on homework, in the middle of a conversation with a friend, or watching TV. Her anxious thoughts were following her everywhere and interfering in her life.

One night, Kaitlyn read a magazine article about managing anxiety, which gave these instructions for stopping anxiety-producing thoughts:

Kaitlyn tried the thought-stopping technique and found that after some practice, it began to help her. Whenever she found herself having an anxious thought about her dad, she immediately told herself to STOP. Then she consciously replaced her anxious thought with a thought about walking her dog on the beach in the summer, which made her relax and smile. When she stopped her anxious thoughts, her anxious feelings stopped too.

Five Steps for Thought Stopping

1. Notice that you are having a thought that causes anxiety.
2. Choose a way to immediately and forcefully tell yourself to STOP this thought. Some ideas include saying "Stop!" out loud or in your mind; picturing a bright red stop sign; picturing yourself pushing your arm out in front of you with your hand in a "halt" position; keeping a light rubber band around your wrist and snapping it gently; giving your head a quick shake as if you were physically shaking off the thought.
3. Consciously exchange the anxious thought for a peaceful thought. You can plan your peaceful thought ahead of time so it's ready immediately.
4. Say your peaceful thought out loud or in your mind.
5. Keep your mind focused on your peaceful thought until the anxious one is completely gone.

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directions

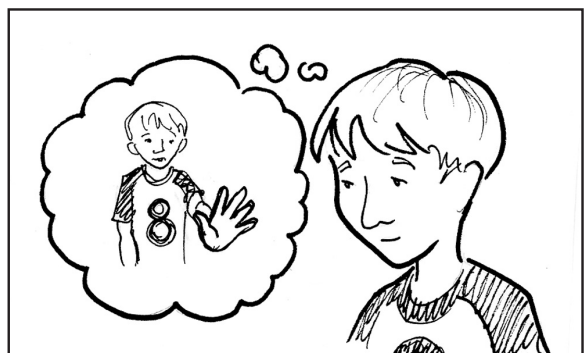
Circle any of the things below that might bring up anxious thoughts for you:

- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| a test in school | performing in front of others |
| meeting new people | asking someone for a date |
| talking with your parents | a particular class |
| what your future holds | your athletic skills |
| talking with other kids | violence or war |
| your parents' marriage | money |
| what you look like | whether or not people like you |
| your report card | your siblings |
| your family | your body |
| your sexuality | your safety |
| class presentations | homework |
| religion | illness |

Write a list of other anxious thoughts that you have had or that you struggle with frequently.

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Circle any of these ideas you might use to immediately and forcefully tell yourself to STOP.



Write any other ideas you have of ways to practice telling yourself to stop.

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Circle any of the sentences or ideas below that you might use as a peaceful thought to exchange for an anxious thought:

“I am confident.”

“I am calm and relaxed.”

“I am laughing with friends.”

petting my cat

listening to music

running

watching floating white clouds

working out

watching a movie

vacationing

playing music

fishing

“I am lying on the beach.”

“I am filled with peace.”

seeing sunsets

napping

watching waves on a lake

reading

looking up on a starry night

hiking in the mountains

being with my best friend

sleeping late

camping

being with my boyfriend/girlfriend

Write a list of any other thoughts that could make you feel peaceful. Your ideas of peace may be different from someone else’s, so think about what really makes you feel relaxed.

Try using the five-step thought-stopping technique over the next few days when you feel anxious. If one thought or picture doesn’t work well, try different ones until you find what works the best for you.

more to do

Sometimes it is hard to identify the thought that brings on an anxious feeling. Describe any situation in which you felt anxious and couldn't identify the thought that caused your anxiety.

To help discover your anxious thought, you can try the following:

- Ask yourself, "If I did know what my anxious thought was, what would it be?"
Write your guess here.

- Ask someone you trust to help you figure out your anxious thought. Write your guess here.

Describe the thought-stopping technique in step 2 that works the best for you.

Write the peaceful thought that works the best for you.

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Even if you have used the thought-stopping technique, anxious thoughts will often return. These thoughts are stubborn and may need to be stopped over and over again. When that happens, simply continue to replace your anxious thought with a peaceful one for as many times as it takes to make it stop.

What is the most stubborn anxious thought you have?
