

Anxiety & Coping Toolkit

Diffusion Techniques

Honor Nutrition & Counseling

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Diffusion techniques come from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). This type of therapy is about letting go, leaning in, and connecting with values. It has some really creative strategies for getting more comfortable with the large variety of thoughts and feelings we have on a daily basis. You are not your thoughts, and you are not your feelings. Here are techniques to help you begin to separate from feeling defined or controlled by your thoughts and feelings. Remember, acceptance isn't "I like this so it's fine." Acceptance is, "I accept that this is the thought/feeling I am having."

Thought Diffusion:

It can often make things harder when we try and focus on getting rid of thoughts or images that are providing discomfort, instead work on accepting when they are around, separating from them, and noticing without judgment. Here are some ways to practice this:

1. Instead of “I’m worthless,” Or “I’m going to fail...” Say: “I notice I’m having the thought that_____”
2. Musical Thoughts: Sing the thought to “happy birthday” or “jingle bells”
3. Naming your stories: Name your most common thoughts as stories: “Oh it’s the—‘I’m a loser story again!”
4. Thanking your mind: “Thanks for sharing!” Or “How very informative!”
5. The silly voice technique: Hear the troubling thought in the voice of a cartoon character’s voice.
6. Television Screen: Bringing an unpleasant image to the mind and then noticing how it’s affecting you. Imagine there’s a small TV screen across the room from you. Place your image on the screen and play around with it. Lighten it, darken it. Slow motion it. Stretch it.
7. Subtitles: Keeping the image on the tv screen, add subtitles. Ex. For an image of you failing you might put, “The failure story.” Add a musical soundtrack!
8. Shifting locations: Visualize the image in different locations. Imagine it on a t-shirt of a jogger, or a rock star. Flying behind an airplane, or on a blimp or billboard.

Emotion Diffusion:

You can learn to be with difficult emotions like anxiety. When we make room for feelings, they tend to move through us and we become more adept at coping with them. Here are some strategies:

1. Body awareness/observe your feelings: Scan your body—which sensations bother you most? If you had to draw an outline around the sensation what shape would it be in? Is there a pulse or vibration? Warm or cool? Color?
2. Breathe into feelings: Slowly breathe into the sensation
3. Make room for them: As you breathe you’re opening up and creating space around the sensation, giving it plenty of space to move.
4. Allow them to be there: Even if you don’t like it—let it be. You might have to say “thanks mind!” If your thinking self doesn’t like it. Don’t try to change or get rid of the sensation.
5. Acceptance self talk: “I don’t like this feeling, but I have room for it.” “It’s unpleasant, but I can accept it.” “I’m having the feeling that_____” “I don’t like it; I don’t want it; I don’t approve of it. But right now, I accept it.”
 - a. Visuals: Observe the feeling as an image
 - b. **Urge Surfing:** If I act on this urge, will I be acting like the person I want to be?
 - i. Observe it—notice where it is in your body
 - ii. “I’m having the urge...”
 - iii. Breathe into it and make room for it
 - iv. Watch it as it rises, crests, and falls. Score the urge on a scale from 1-10. Keep checking in on the urge and scoring it.
 - v. What action can I take right now instead of trying to resist or control my urges, that will enhance my life in the long term? Then whatever the answer is...go along with it!

Adapted from: The Happiness Track, by Russ Harris