

Defusion for Negative Thinking

Defusion is a powerful tool from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) to disconnect from negative thoughts. When dealing with frequent negative thinking, it's easy to believe that every one of our negative thoughts is true. This worksheet will help you use defusion to “zoom out” and view your thoughts as what they are - just thoughts, not necessarily truths.

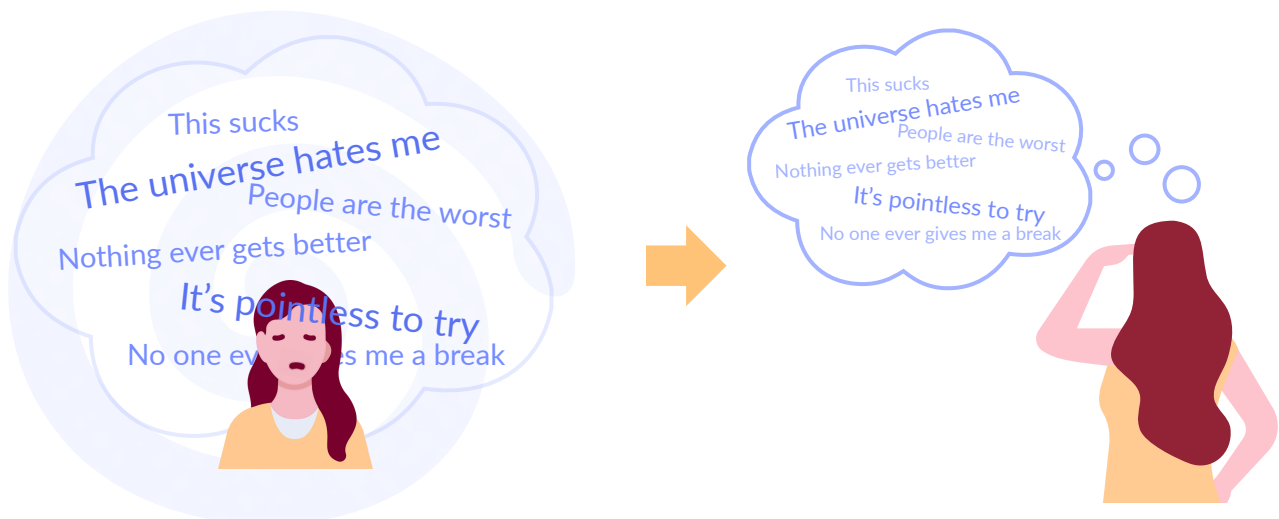
Observe your negative thoughts

Think through your own negative thoughts. What sorts of thoughts frequently come up for you?

- | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> “This sucks” | <input type="checkbox"/> “I just know today’s going to be bad” |
| <input type="checkbox"/> “This is pointless” | <input type="checkbox"/> “I should be doing better than this” |
| <input type="checkbox"/> “Other people have it so much easier” | <input type="checkbox"/> “Something awful is going to happen eventually” |
| <input type="checkbox"/> “People are the worst” | <input type="checkbox"/> “There’s just something wrong with me” |
| <input type="checkbox"/> “I always get screwed over” | <input type="checkbox"/> “Nothing ever gets any better” |
| <input type="checkbox"/> “No one actually cares” | <input type="checkbox"/> “It’s pointless to try” |
| <input type="checkbox"/> “The universe hates me” | <input type="checkbox"/> “No one ever gives me a break” |

The goal of defusion

The goal of defusion is to use mindfulness skills to move from being stuck “inside” our negative thoughts to observing our negative thoughts from the “outside.” When we can zoom out and observe our thoughts in this way, it’s much easier to disconnect with them and/or see that they are unhelpful or untrue.



*This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.



Defusion for Negative Thinking

Ways to defuse

The key to defusion is nonjudgmental observation - a core mindfulness skill. **Observation** is “watching” or “hearing” your thoughts as they happen. You might say to yourself, “I notice I’m having thoughts about X,” or, “Y is really on my mind today.”

Nonjudgmental observation is taking a neutral stance towards the thoughts you are noticing. It’s really common to think, “Oh no, my thoughts are so negative today, this is going to be a terrible week...” and to get stuck in negativity again. Try your best to just notice and stay in the present.

If nonjudgmental observation feels a little abstract, here are four more specific ways to try defusion:

Drift on by

Imagine placing each thought on a cloud or a leaf falling from a tree. “Watch” each thought slowly drift away through the air. Remind yourself that thoughts come and go.

Recall your thoughts during a difficult time in the past. Do those thoughts still have a hold on you? Or have they drifted away?

Give it a name

One easy way to defuse is to just name who is “speaking” when you have negative thoughts. You might say to yourself, “That’s perfectionism talking,” or, “I notice I’m having people-pleasing thoughts.”

You could also give your thoughts a real name - for example, “Wow, Steve is acting up today! Thanks, but I’m good, Steve!”

Make it silly

In your mind, repeat your thoughts in a silly way. This might sound weird, but “hearing” your thought voiced by a cartoon character, actor, or to a funny tune might be enough to help you emotionally detach from the thought and make it less powerful.

For bonus points - sing your thought aloud if you can!

Sportscaster

When you notice negative thoughts, observe them like a sportscaster might. This might sound like - “Here we are at the end of the workday and - wow! A move straight from the perfectionism playbook - that’s beating yourself up over small mistakes. What a play!”



Defusion for Negative Thinking

The point of defusion is not to make your negative thinking stop - it's to reduce the effect of negative thinking on your mood and decisions. Detaching from your thoughts can give you enough space to decide what to do next (like ignore your thoughts, challenge them, problem-solve, or get support), rather than having your negative thoughts decide for you.

Give it a try

The next time you experience repetitive negative thoughts, try one of the defusion techniques above. How did it go? What did it feel like? Will you try another defusion technique?

An important note

Defusion is great for repetitive, negative thoughts that are *inaccurate, unhelpful, or untrue*. These thoughts are often called cognitive distortions and they are not an accurate reflection of reality - instead, they “distort” your perspective and make it much more negative. These kind of thoughts happen often when someone is dealing with anxiety, depression, stress, etc.

What if you are experiencing negative thoughts because something truly negative has happened? That is, what if your negative thoughts are not distorted? Then it might be time to instead:

- Engage in self-care
- Reach out for support
- Consider therapy

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Additional Resources to Support Your Mental Health Journey

It can be hard to know where to begin looking for support in your mental health journey. Getting a referral from a primary care physician is a reliable first step. Also, sometimes family and friends have experienced similar issues and have professionals they would recommend. The experts at ChoosingTherapy.com are here to help as well, with resources we have reviewed and recommend. Our [strict editorial standards](#) ensure our reviews are fair, honest, thorough, and based on firsthand experience.

You Can Trust ChoosingTherapy.com



325+
Companies Reviewed



3,625+
Hours of Firsthand Experience



1,545+
Data Points Analyzed



[Best Online Therapy](#)

Online therapy is a convenient way to connect with a licensed therapist to address mental health issues, reduce unhealthy behaviors, develop effective coping skills, and get more satisfaction out of life. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.

[Best Online Psychiatry](#)

Online psychiatry providers enable patients to consult with licensed psychiatrists and other mental health professionals. They can evaluate, diagnose, and prescribe medication to help manage mental health issues. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.



[Best Mental Health Apps](#)

Apps can be great way to monitor mood, track sleep, journal, and practice healthy coping skills like mindfulness and meditation. There are apps specifically designed to help people reduce the symptoms of depression, anxiety, ADHD, chronic stress, and burnout.

[Therapist Directory](#)

When you're looking for a mental health provider with a very particular skill set, level of experience, or personality type, a therapist directory can be very helpful. Using the filters, you can refine your search until you find a therapist who feels like a perfect fit.





Tools for Self-Assessment and Psychoeducation

Figuring out the next step in your mental health journey can be overwhelming. Developed by psychologists, the tools at [ChoosingTherapy.com](https://choosingtherapy.com) can help. Our mental health self-assessment quizzes can help you explore common symptoms of mental health concerns, as well as find the best therapy style for you. Our mental health worksheets can guide you through therapy concepts and how to use them in your life.

[Learn More with Mental Health Quizzes](#)

Our collection of psychologist-developed mental health quizzes can help you learn if you are experiencing mild, moderate, or concerning levels of anxiety, depression, stress, burnout, and more. Each quiz also provides targeted resources based on your answers. These self-assessments are designed to offer insight, not diagnoses, and can be a helpful first step in recognizing symptoms and deciding whether to seek further support. If you have concerns about your mental health or your quiz results, we recommend you reach out to a licensed mental health professional.



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