

Mindfulness of Current Thoughts

DBT: Distress Tolerance Skills

Sometimes it feels like anxious or distressing thoughts completely take over. Mindfulness skills help us tolerate these thoughts and see them as temporary products of a busy brain rather than absolute truth. This worksheet helps you learn and practice four steps to increase your mindfulness.



Our thoughts can feel very overwhelming at times. Sometimes they may feel so intense that it's like they cloud our vision - we can't seem to "see" beyond them. Thoughts like this often feel:

- Crucial: they're so important that we can't (and shouldn't) let them go
- Urgent: like you have to act on your thoughts as soon as possible

If we choose to focus on these thoughts when they come up, they can snowball and become hard to escape. We might end up acting impulsively or getting caught in an anxious spiral.

At times like this, it can help to see thoughts in a different way:

- Thoughts are just thoughts.
- A thought popping into your mind doesn't make it a fact.
- The brain is like a factory that makes thousands of thoughts a day. That's just what it does.

Seeing thoughts this way is like **observing them from a distance rather than being swept up by them.**

This is the first step in practicing mindfulness of your current thoughts.

1 Observe your thoughts

Just take note of your thoughts.

- Don't try to suppress or ignore them
- Don't hold onto them
- Don't try to analyze them
- Don't judge yourself for having them

Acknowledge them and "watch" them go by, like leaves floating on a stream, clouds floating by, or train cars passing.



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



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2 Get curious

You are not your thoughts, and your thoughts are not you. Thoughts are separate things that you can observe from a distance, like a scientist observing wildlife. Be like a scientist and get curious:

- Ask, “Where did that thought come from?”
- Take notes: “A thought about [subject] has entered my mind.”
- Watch your thoughts coming and going. Which thought comes first? Which ones follow it?
- Observe like a scientist. Take objective notes, and don’t disturb your thoughts in their natural habitat by interacting with them (questioning them, analyzing them, judging them).



3 Remind yourself

- You are not your thoughts
- Thoughts come and go, but you remain
- You don’t have to act on your thoughts
- Thoughts are temporary (remember times you’ve had very different thoughts)
- Your emotion mind may be overriding your rational mind
- You will likely think differently when you are not feeling pain or suffering

4 Don’t block or suppress thoughts



Trying to suppress certain thoughts often makes them stronger.

- Sometimes we suppress thoughts because they come along with unpleasant sensations or emotions that we would like to avoid.
- Attend to the sensation or emotion. Then attend to the thought. Repeat, shifting your attention back and forth.
- Relax your face and body and breathe deeply as you let your thoughts come and go.

You can make your thoughts less powerful by allowing them to exist in your mind, “picking them up,” and “playing” with your thoughts. You might try:

- Repeating your thought out loud until it doesn’t seem to mean anything anymore
- Say them very slowly, or in a very high or low voice, or while doing an impression of someone
- Sing them to a melody that fits the thoughts, or say them and emphasize a different word each time
- Consider trying to cope ahead or using opposite action

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Use these pages to practice the four mindfulness steps and reflect on the process.

1 Observe

What thoughts are bothering you? Just quickly jot them down - don't analyze them, judge yourself for having them, or get stuck on one in particular.

2 Get curious

Observe your thoughts objectively, like a scientist:

Topic of thoughts:

Events just before thoughts:

Mood just before thoughts:

Mood after thoughts:

Where thoughts may have come from:

Notes:

3 Remind yourself

Check a phrase to repeatedly remind yourself, or write your own:

- You are not your thoughts
- Thoughts come and go, but you remain
- You don't have to act on your thoughts
- Thoughts are temporary (remember times you've had very different thoughts)
- Your emotion mind may be overriding your rational mind
- You will likely think differently when you are not feeling pain or suffering
- Other:

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4 Don't block or suppress Try at least one of the techniques below:

- Attend to the sensation or emotion you're avoiding. Then attend to the thought. Repeat, shifting your attention back and forth
- Relax your face and body and breathe deeply as you let your thoughts come and go
- Repeat your thought out loud until it doesn't seem to mean anything anymore
- Say your thoughts very slowly
- Say your thoughts in a very high or very low voice
- Say your thoughts while doing an impression of someone
- Sing your thoughts to a melody that fits them
- Say your thoughts and emphasize a different word each time
- Cope ahead: rehearse how you would think if you did not see your thoughts as facts
- Use opposite action: imagine what you would do if you did not see your thoughts as facts. Do these things now
- Watch your thoughts go by like products on a factory conveyor belt, leaves on a stream, clouds floating by, train cars passing, or similar
- Other:

5 Reflect How effective were the techniques you used? Add any other notes here:

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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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