

# Step Back From Your Thoughts



## **Explanation**

This is the ACT process of cognitive defusion vs. cognitive fusion. This is a fancy way of saying, having some distance from your thoughts vs. being constantly identified with everything your mind tells you.

Throughout one's day, the mind may make commentary regarding how things should be: "I should have done that better... he should do things a different way... The government should fix this."

Although these thoughts could potentially be useful in helping us improve ourselves, others, and society, they are often intrusive and rigid, causing us to react rather than step back and act mindfully and effectively.

This temptation to be rigidly identified with our thoughts comes from the yearning for a sense of coherence and understanding.

We want the world around us to make sense and we want a sense of understanding of how things work. When one's mind becomes too rigid, we try to impose a false sense of order on the world, treating life as a problem to be solved.

Living more and more in your head, one may develop defense mechanisms such as rationalization and intellectualization.

You may feel like you need to be right, constantly debating, and looking for opportunities to argue your perspective. Learning to step back from your thoughts allows for increased cognitive flexibility, allowing you to mindfully engage in dialogue more openly with yourself and others.

Learning to talk to yourself more flexibly is the foundation of this process.

## **Exercise**

Pick a particular intrusive thought.

Now imagine that thought is written on your hand. If you had to place that thought at any distance from your face, how close is that thought right now?

If your hand is covering your eyes, notice how difficult it would be to engage in daily life with this thought so close. Now, move your hand away and slightly to the side.

Now you can see the thought clearly, in addition to the rest of the world around you. The thought will not go away, but this distance allows you to move forward effectively.

## **Why it works?**

This is designed to facilitate a process whereby a person can flexibly relate to their thoughts rather than being dominated by them. When the mind becomes a dictator, we lose control of our focus, being pulled into rigid ways of being.

Getting some distance from our thoughts allows for a more functional way of being, engaging with issues pragmatically as they arise, rather than trying to impose a false sense of order onto the world. Gaining distance from the dictator within allows for greater wisdom and peace of mind.