

5 WAYS TO DEFUSE ANXIOUS THOUGHTS

Pick the one or two things that most appeal to you, and try them repeatedly over the span of a few days. If it works, keep going with it; if it doesn't, try another exercise on the list instead.

Your Mind, With a Capital “M:” Think of your mind as a separate entity from yourself. Name it “Mind.” When the anxious chatter begins, tell yourself something like, “Well, there goes Mind again, chitchatting away” or “Wow, Mind is doing that thing he loves to do, telling me how nothing will ever work out.” By treating the mind as an external, rather than internal, creature you might create enough space between you and your thoughts to feel a bit better.

The Car Radio That Won't Turn Off: Imagine that you are sitting in the passenger seat of a car, and the driver has turned on an awful radio station that is playing a soundtrack of your anxious thoughts. You're not in a position to change it or turn it off; instead, you must tolerate it and accept that the thoughts are there and that the noise is unpleasant.

A Keychain in Your Pocket: You most likely carry a set of keys with you always. Try assigning each of your most common anxious thoughts to a specific key. When you use that key, make yourself think the corresponding thought. Notice that you can carry the thought and not always think it, and also that when you do think the thought, you can still use the key. It is possible to carry difficult beliefs with you and not let them dictate your actions.

A Bossy Bully: Treat your thought like a bully on the playground of adulthood and ask, “Who is in charge here? Is my thought in charge or am I in charge?” If it helps, get a little angry at the thought—colorful language included—as you assert yourself against the bossy bully.

Thoughts for Sale: Distinguish between a thought you are having and a thought you are buying as true. Label your thoughts: judgment, criticism, comparison, exaggeration, etc. Then ask yourself, “Do I want to buy the thought that I am _____?” Consider what it will cost you and if it's really a good investment.