WORKSHEET 01 · FOR THE PSYCHOLOGIST

I’m having the thought that…

Stepping back from anxious thoughts (defusion)

AIM

Help the person observe their anxious thoughts as thoughts, not as facts or orders, to reduce their influence without trying to get rid of them.

WHO IT IS FOR

Generalised anxiety, repetitive worries, self-critical thoughts. Adults and older adolescents.

DURATION

10-15 min in session, then 2 min a day

HOW TO RUN IT

1. Ask for a frequent anxious thought, in a few words (e.g. “I’m going to fail”). Rate from 0 to 10 how much it hooks them.
2. Ask them to repeat it with the prefix “I’m having the thought that…”, then “I notice I’m having the thought that…”. Ask what changes.
3. Variant: repeat the key word out loud for 30 seconds, until it loses its meaning (Titchener’s technique).
4. Rate the hook again. The aim is not for the thought to disappear, but for it to carry less weight in the person’s choices.
5. Suggest the worksheet on page 2 as homework between sessions.

POINTS TO WATCH

> Don’t present the exercise as a way of getting rid of thoughts: that reinforces the struggle. If the person feels mocked by the repetition, go back to the simple prefix.

REFERENCES

Hayes, S. C., Strosahl, K. D. & Wilson, K. G. (2012). Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: The Process and Practice of Mindful Change (2nd ed.). Guilford.

Masuda, A., Hayes, S. C., Sackett, C. F. & Twohig, M. P. (2004). Cognitive defusion and self-relevant negative thoughts: Examining the impact of a ninety year old technique. Behaviour Research and Therapy, 42(4), 477-485.

PSYCHOLOGIST’S NOTES

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WORKSHEET 01 · WORKSHEET TO HAND OUT

I notice my thoughts

Thoughts are not facts. They are words passing through your head. This exercise is not about silencing them, but about looking at them from a little further away.

1. Write the thought down as it comes.
2. Rewrite it starting with “I’m having the thought that…”.
3. Then with “I notice I’m having the thought that…”.
4. Rate from 0 to 10 how much it hooks you, before and after.

Thought	“I’m having the thought that…”	Before /10	After /10

What did you notice when you held the thought a little further away?

These exercises do not replace therapy. If you are in distress or having suicidal thoughts: 112 (European Union), 3114 (France) or the emergency number of the country where you live.

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