

THOUGHT STOPPING

- When we focus on worries, problems, and other distracting thoughts it is common for them to continually branch off into increasingly negative and distracting ideas, views, and feelings that are difficult, and sometimes impossible, to stop
- The further you continue down these “rabbit holes” the farther from, and more difficult to return to, the original thought
- This often turns from an attempt to problem-solve, cope, and process into harmful scrutiny, installing feelings of failure and inadequacy, and, consequently, maladaptive beliefs and behaviors
- These thoughts and feelings can consume us for excessive periods of time and only serve to worsen depression, anxiety, anger, and other psychological distress
- One consequence of this process is what is known as rumination. Rumination is when we focus our attention on the symptoms, causes, and consequences of our distress instead of solutions.

Thought stopping can be a helpful tool to disrupt this harmful process.

1. To use this tool, you must be able to identify when you are starting to branch from constructive thoughts into destructive and useless territory.
 - a. One way to identify when this is happening, is to notice when you find yourself starting to self-criticize and your mood begins to crash.
 - b. It may be helpful to enlist the help of others around you to prompt you when they start to notice these symptoms as well
2. Once you can identify when this is happening, immediately imagine a large, bright red stop sign popping into your mind



Like a big red barricade in the middle of the tracks that suddenly cuts off the train of thought

- a. You can think of other authoritative objects or figures if you find the stop sign is not working (maybe a police officer blowing a whistle, a curtain falling down or closing and blocking your view, maybe a steel vault door shutting, etc.).
3. When you have interrupted your thought process, take a deep breath in and out and tell yourself “This is not going to help me. This is only going to make me feel worse”
4. At this point, find a distracting activity
 - a. This can be some breathing exercises, watching TV, calling a friend or family member to talk, go for a walk outside, or anything else that will change your focus.