

Cognitive Defusion

Unhooking from thoughts. CBT for Depression and Anxiety — Session 3.

Cognitive defusion means learning to see a thought as just a thought. A thought is made of words, or of pictures in your mind. A thought is not a fact. A thought is not an order that you must obey.

In Session 2, we checked whether a thought was true and fair. Here we use a different tool: we do not argue with the thought. We notice it, and we give it less power over what we do.

Hooked and unhooked: When a hard thought controls what you do, you are *hooked* by it. When you notice the thought and still choose what to do, you are *unhooked*. The thought may still be there. It just controls you less.

A short exercise: “I can’t stand up”

Say out loud: “I can’t stand up.” Keep saying it. Now stand up while you say it. You stood up. The words were not true, and they were not an order. Your mind says many things each day. Some are true, some are not. You do not have to do what each one says.

Your mind is like a radio

Think of your mind as a radio that plays gloomy news all day — call it **Radio Doom and Gloom**. You cannot turn it off. But you can let it play in the background, and turn your attention to what you are doing.

Ways to unhook from a thought

1. Name the thought

Say: “I am having the thought that I will fail.” It is a thought, not a fact.

2. Thank your mind

Say: “Thank you, mind.” Your mind is trying to protect you. You can hear it, and still choose what to do.

3. Use a funny voice

Say the thought in a slow, deep voice, or a high, fast voice. The words stay the same. They feel less strong.

4. Picture leaves on water

Picture leaves on a stream. Put one thought on each leaf, and watch it move away. New leaves will come. That is normal.

5. Radio Doom and Gloom

When a gloomy thought plays, say: “There is Radio Doom and Gloom again.” You do not need to argue with the radio. Let it play, and turn back to what you are doing.

6. Passengers on the Bus

Imagine you are driving your life bus, and your thoughts are passengers that get on and off.

7. Thoughts as subtitles

As you do things all day, imagine your thoughts as words that come and go in front of you, like subtitles at a movie.

The goal is **not** to make bad thoughts stop. It is to notice them, and to choose your next step — a towards move, from Session 1 — even when they are present.

Your turn

Think of one thought that often hooks you. Write it below. Then write it again, starting with: “I am having the thought that...”

The thought that hooks me is:	
What changed when I said it as a thought?	
A towards move I can choose anyway:	

Practice this week: Once a day, notice when you are hooked, and use one of these methods.