

Jamison: Patient Education and Wellness

HANDOUT 18.4: MENTAL STRATEGIES

Tips for mental relaxation:

☐ DETACHED OBSERVATION

Assume a posture of dissociation by:

- sitting in a straight-backed chair about 4–5 inches from the back of the chair
- leaning back comfortably against the back of the chair
- feeling your shoulders move back a little further
- letting your eyes relax and unfocused
- letting your chin rise slightly and your head move back

Experience a feeling of detachment

☐ THOUGHT STOPPING

Thought stopping is recommended for problem thinking rather than behaviors. People who find themselves repeatedly experiencing disagreeable thoughts or visualizing unpleasant scenes that cause them distress may learn to block these images. This technique can be mastered in 3 to 7 days. When negative or unhelpful thoughts keep reverberating and are revisited, identify the intrusive thought and deliberately put it aside and focus your mind on something positive. It requires that you:

- recognize stressful thoughts and images
- interrupt unwanted thoughts by:
 - dwelling on the thought
 - then deliberately emptying your mind. Aim to keep your mind blank for 30 seconds
 - if/when the unwanted thought recurs, think *STOP!!*

Practice stopping unwanted thoughts and substitute positive self-talk. With practice, you can control your thinking!

Thought stopping is particularly useful for phobias such as fear of elevators or the dark.

☐ AFFIRMATIONS

Three rules for using affirmations effectively are:

- using ‘I’ statements in the active voice. Remember you can decide what you do, not what others may do. Change your own behavior rather than attempting to change that of others
- using positive statements. Think of what you want to do, never of what you want to avoid. Direct your thought to where you want to be, not to where you don’t want to go. Our brains do not think in the negative – in order to know what not to think, you have to think of it first!
- avoiding contradictory affirmation. If you feel tense and say ‘I am calm’, you will be aware of the ambiguity. Overcome this by saying ‘Everyday I am becoming more calm physically’ or “‘I am learning to have an alert mind and calm body

- a good affirmation is positive, personal, in the present tense ('I am ... [an active verb]', 'I am ...ing'), visual, emotional, i.e. associated with feeling, and brief, i.e. to the point.

☐ VISUALIZATION

The rules for effective visualization include:

- use colour, sound, taste, touch, smell and sight to visualize in all dimensions
- imagine yourself doing something. Always visualize the positive action – see yourself doing, not avoiding doing
- be specific in your visualization

For stress release using guided imagery:

- assume a comfortable position
- clarify that your goal is relaxation. Let go of your stress
- progressive relaxation techniques may be used
- visualize yourself doing something relaxing, e.g. strolling through a wood
- feel nourished and revitalized

See also

Building social support

<http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/go/mental-health-month/building-social-support>

Dreams and stress <http://www.webmd.com/video/breus-dreams>

Movies and stress <http://www.webmd.com/mental-health/features/movie-therapy-using-movies-for-mental-health>

Controlling stress improves depression <http://www.webmd.com/video/link-stress-depression>

Overview http://kidshealth.org/teen/your_mind/emotions/stress.html