

## SUMMARY OF TECHNIQUES FOR UNHOOKING FROM THOUGHTS

UNHOOKING from our thoughts means separating from them, seeing them for what they truly are, and allowing them to be as they are. The technical name for this is “defusion” (short for “cognitive defusion”).

Many unhooking techniques involve either accentuating the visual properties of thoughts (in other words, “seeing” them), highlighting the auditory properties of thoughts (“hearing” them), or both. I encourage you to play around with the techniques that follow and to be curious about what will happen. You can’t accurately predict in advance which techniques will work best for you—any given technique might give have no effect whatsoever, or just a tiny bit, or a massive amount. (At times, it could even hook you more; this is uncommon, but it does occasionally happen.)

Keep in mind that the purpose of unhooking is not to get rid of unwanted thoughts, nor is it to reduce unpleasant feelings. The purpose is to enable you to do towards moves and engage fully in life instead of getting lost in, pushed around or held back by your thoughts.

*WARNING: HAPPINESS TRAP AHEAD!! When we unhook from unhelpful thoughts, we often find that they quickly disappear or our unpleasant feelings rapidly reduce—but such outcomes are lucky bonuses, not the main aim. So, by all means enjoy these things when they happen, but don’t expect them; if you start using these methods to try to achieve such outcomes, you will soon be disappointed.*

Once you try these out and find one or two that really help you to unhook, play around with them over the next few weeks and see what difference they make. However, if any of these techniques make you feel like your thoughts are being trivialized or discounted or mocked, then do not use them.

First, on a piece of paper, jot down several of the thoughts that most frequently hook you and distress you. For each technique, pick one of these thoughts to work with, go step by step through the exercise, and be open to whatever happens.

### WRITTEN UNHOOKING TECHNIQUES

#### Writing thoughts on a choice point

1. Write two or three distressing thoughts at the bottom of a large piece of paper. (If you don’t have access to paper and pens right now, you can try doing this exercise in your imagination).
2. Above these thoughts, draw a choice point with towards and away arrows. Write in the away moves you make when these thoughts hook you, and the towards moves you’d like to do instead.

#### Writing Thoughts In A Thought Bubble

1. Write two or three distressing thoughts at the TOP of a large piece of paper. (If you don’t have access to paper and pens right now, you can try doing this exercise in your imagination). Below them, draw a stick figure (or, if you have an artistic streak, a cartoon character or other figure drawing).

2. Now draw a “thought bubble” around those words, as if they are coming out of the head of your stick figure (just like those thought bubbles you see in comic strips). Now look at the drawing you’ve just created: Does this make any difference to the way you relate to those thoughts?

3. Try this a few times, with different thoughts and stick figures (or cartoons). Put different faces on your stick figures—a smiley face, a sad face, or a face with big teeth or spiky hair. Draw a cat, or a dog, or a flower, with the very same thought bubble coming out of it. What difference does this make to the impact of those thoughts? Does it help you to see them as words?

## **VISUAL UNHOOKING TECHNIQUES**

### **Thoughts On A Computer Screen**

You can do this exercise in your imagination or on a computer. (For most people it’s more powerful to do it on a real computer.) First write (or imagine) your thought in standard black lowercase text on the computer screen, and then play around with the font and the color. Change it into several different colors, fonts, and sizes, and notice what effect each change makes. (Note: Bold red capitals are likely to hook most people, whereas a lowercase pale pink font is more likely to unhook.)

Then change the text back to the original black lowercase font, and this time play around with the formatting. Space the words out, placing large gaps between them. Run the words together with no gaps between them so they make one long word. Run them vertically down the screen. Then put them back together as one sentence.

How do you relate to those thoughts now? Is it easier to see that they are words? (Remember, we are not interested in whether the thoughts are true or false; we just want to see them for what they are.)

### **Karaoke Ball**

Imagine your thought as words on a karaoke screen. Imagine a bouncing ball jumping from word to word across the screen. Repeat this several times. If you like, you can even imagine yourself up on stage singing along to the words on the screen.

### **Changing Scenarios**

Imagine your thought in a variety of different settings. Take about five to ten seconds to imagine each scenario, and then move onto the next one. See your thought written in the following ways:

- In playful, colorful letters on the cover of a children’s book
- As stylish graphics on a restaurant menu
- As icing on top of a birthday cake
- In chalk on a blackboard
- As a slogan on the T-shirt of a jogger

## **Leaves on a Stream or Clouds in the Sky**

Imagine leaves gently floating down a stream or clouds gently floating through the sky. Take your thoughts, place them on those leaves or clouds, and watch them gently float on by.

## **AUDITORY UNHOOKING TECHNIQUES**

### **Silly Voices**

Say your thought to yourself in a silly voice, either silently or out loud. (Saying it out loud is generally more effective for defusing, but obviously you need to pick the time and place; it doesn't go down well in a business meeting!) For example, you might choose the voice of a cartoon character, movie star, sports commentator, or someone with an outrageous foreign accent. Try several different voices, and notice what happens.

### **Smart Phone Apps**

Say your thought aloud into a smart phone app that changes your voice (like Talking Carl or Voice Changer) or adds music (like Songify)

### **Slow and Fast**

Say your thought to yourself, either silently or out loud, first at an ultra-slow pace, and then at super-fast speed (so you sound like a chipmunk).

### **Singing**

Sing your thoughts to yourself, either silently or out loud, to the tune of "Happy Birthday." Then try it with a couple of other tunes.

## **NOTICING & NAMING TECHNIQUES**

### **Naming The Theme, Story or Thinking Process**

When you notice a recurrent theme, story or thinking process acknowledge it is happening and silently name it. E.g. say to yourself: "There's my not good enough story", or "Predicting the worst", or "Worrying", or "Mind chatter", or "Dwelling on the past" or "Doubting myself" or "Judging" or "Reason Giving" or even just "Thinking"

### **Thanking Your Mind**

After noticing and naming your thoughts as above, you can add, with a sense of humour and playfulness, a silent “Thanks mind”. Or if appropriate, “Thanks mind, I know you are trying to help, and it’s okay – I’ve got this covered.”

### **CREATE YOUR OWN UNHOOKING TECHNIQUES**

Now, invent your own techniques. All you need to do is put your thought in a new context where you can “see” it or “hear” it, or both. For example, you might visualize your thought presented in any number of ways: painted on a canvas, printed on a postcard, emblazoned on the chest of a comic book superhero, carved on the shield of a medieval knight, printed on a banner trailing behind an airplane, tattooed on the back of a biker, or written on the side of a zebra among all its stripes. Or you could paint it, draw it, or sculpt it. Or you could imagine it dancing, jumping, or playing football. Or you could visualize it moving down a TV screen, like the credits of a movie. Alternatively, you might imagine hearing your thought being recited by a Shakespearean actor, being broadcast from a radio, being uttered by a robot, or being sung by a rock star. You are limited only by your own creativity, so be sure to play around and have some fun.