

Cognitive Fusion vs. Defusion

A CORE PRACTICE FROM ACCEPTANCE & COMMITMENT THERAPY

Fusion happens when we become tangled up in a thought, treating it as literal truth. Defusion means noticing the thought as a mental event — words passing through the mind — which can loosen its grip on our behaviour.

Fusion

Responding to a thought as though it were fact, an instruction, or an accurate reflection of reality — without noticing it is just a thought.

Defusion

Stepping back to observe a thought as a passing mental event, creating enough distance to choose how to respond, rather than being controlled by it.

SITUATION	FUSED THOUGHT	DEFUSED VERSION
Making a mistake at work	"I'm incompetent. I always mess things up."	"I'm having the thought that I'm incompetent."
Before a difficult conversation	"This is going to go badly. I can't do this."	"My mind is predicting this will go badly — and I can still try."
Comparing yourself to others	"Everyone else has it figured out except me."	"I notice the thought that I'm behind everyone else."
After receiving criticism	"They think I'm useless. They must be right."	"I'm having the thought that they think I'm useless."
Facing an unfamiliar task	"I won't be able to handle this."	"There's a thought here that says I won't handle this — noted."
Worrying about the future	"Something bad is definitely going to happen."	"My mind is doing its 'predicting disaster' thing again."
Feeling anxious in a social setting	"Everyone can tell how anxious I am."	"I'm noticing the thought that people can see my anxiety."
Struggling with a decision	"If I choose wrong, everything will fall apart."	"My mind is telling me this decision is high-stakes — thanks, mind."
Replaying an awkward moment	"That was so embarrassing. They probably think less of me now."	"I notice my mind keeps replaying that moment."

Defusion doesn't try to argue a thought away or make it untrue — it changes your relationship to the thought, so it has less influence over what you do next.

SOURCES

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