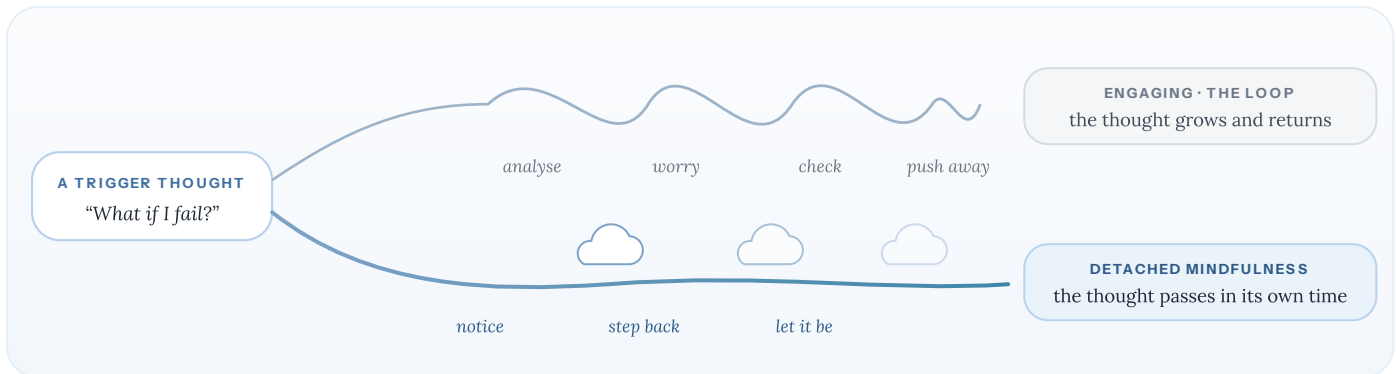


Detached Mindfulness

Relating differently to thoughts, from metacognitive therapy

Developed by Adrian Wells, detached mindfulness means **noticing a thought without engaging with it**: not analysing it, arguing with it, worrying about it or trying to push it away. Much of our distress comes less from having a difficult thought than from what we do with it next.



01 Two parts working together

MINDFULNESS

Noticing the thought

Being aware that a thought, image or feeling has arrived, and seeing it as an event in the mind rather than a fact or an instruction.

+

DETACHMENT

Not responding to it

Stepping back instead of reacting: no analysing, reassuring, checking or suppressing. You watch it, and let it go about its business.

02 Three principles

i

Notice, don't engage

See the thought as passing activity in the mind, separate from you and from what you need to do.

ii

Let it be there

There is no need to make it stop. Trying to suppress a thought often makes it more persistent.

iii

Allow it to pass

Thoughts rise and fade on their own when we stop feeding them with extra thinking.

03 What it is, and isn't

DETACHED MINDFULNESS IS

- ✓ **Choosing** not to respond to a thought
- ✓ A light, **passive** awareness
- ✓ Letting thoughts **come and go** freely
- ✓ Something you can do in a few seconds, anywhere

IT ISN'T

- × Pushing thoughts away or blocking them
- × Distracting yourself so you don't notice
- × Relaxation or positive thinking
- × Deciding whether the thought is true

04 Ways to try it

Techniques described by Wells (2005)

The tiger task

Picture a tiger. Don't try to make it do anything; just watch how it moves on its own.

Free association

Hear a list of simple words and notice what comes to mind, without steering it.

The passenger train

Watch thoughts like trains passing a platform. You can see them without boarding.

The recalcitrant child

Like a demanding child, a thought settles faster when you don't engage with every demand.

05 Between sessions: my practice log

Notice the urge to engage, and practise stepping back

DAY · TIME	THE THOUGHT <i>a few words</i>	MY URGE WAS TO ... <i>analyse · worry · check · push away</i>	WHAT I DID
			☐ stepped back ☐ engaged
			☐ stepped back ☐ engaged
			☐ stepped back ☐ engaged
			☐ stepped back ☐ engaged
			☐ stepped back ☐ engaged

Worth knowing

Detached mindfulness is related to, but not the same as, **cognitive defusion** in ACT and to **meditation-based mindfulness**: it needs no meditation and aims only to stop engaging. It is a core part of metacognitive therapy, which a meta-analysis found effective for anxiety and depression (Normann & Morina, 2018).

SOURCES

Normann, N., & Morina, N. (2018). The efficacy of metacognitive therapy: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, 2211. · Wells, A. (2005). Detached mindfulness in cognitive therapy: A metacognitive analysis and ten techniques. *Journal of Rational-Emotive & Cognitive-Behavior Therapy*, 23(4), 337-355. · Wells, A. (2009). *Metacognitive therapy for anxiety and depression*. Guilford Press.