

The Mind's Inbox

COGNITIVE DEFUSION

Your mind sends messages. You don't have to answer every one.

A different way to relate to thoughts

All day long, the mind sends messages: thoughts, predictions, memories, worries and running commentary.

They arrive automatically. Some are helpful, some aren't; some are accurate, some aren't.

Cognitive defusion is a skill for noticing a message as a message, without automatically treating it as a fact or an instruction.



Not every message needs a reply

A thought might be:

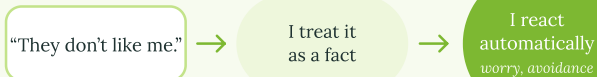
- USEFUL** (checkmark icon): "Remember to send that email."
- UNCERTAIN** (question mark icon): "What if they're disappointed?"
- OLD** (clock icon): "This always happens."
- PROTECTIVE** (shield icon): "Don't risk it."
- IMPORTANT** (heart icon): "I don't feel comfortable here."

The skill isn't deciding every message is wrong. It's being able to receive a message without automatically obeying it.

A message is not a command.

You can notice it, read it, consider it, and then choose whether to act on it.

WHEN I'M FUSED



WHEN I'M DEFUSED



Read the message. Choose the response. A SHORT PRACTICE FOR CREATING SPACE

1 What is happening? The situation, without the story	2 What message did my mind send? The exact words that showed up “	3 Create some space Try a phrase, or use your own ☐ I'm having the thought that... ☐ I notice my mind is saying... ☐ My mind is predicting... ☐ My mind is remembering... ☐ There's a part of me thinking...	4 Do I need to reply? A helpful next step, based on what matters to me
---	--	--	--

What the research suggests: defusion is a core process in acceptance and commitment therapy (Hayes et al., 2006). Experimental studies suggest brief defusion exercises can reduce how believable and distressing negative self-related thoughts feel, at least in the short term (Masuda et al., 2004). Like any skill, it may take practice, and it won't suit every situation.

SOURCES

Hayes, S. C., Luoma, J. B., Bond, F. W., Masuda, A., & Lillis, J. (2006). Acceptance and commitment therapy: Model, processes and outcomes. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 44(1), 1–25.

Masuda, A., Hayes, S. C., Sackett, C. F., & Twohig, M. P. (2004). Cognitive defusion and self-relevant negative thoughts: Examining the impact of a ninety year old technique. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 42(4), 477–485.