

Don't Believe Everything You Think: How to Challenge and Escape the Domination of Unhelpful Thoughts

Bill O'Hanlon, Bill@billohanlon.com, <http://www.billohanlon.com>

You Are Not Your Mind

You are bigger than your mind, but sometimes it seems as though your mind has you or thoughts are thinking you

Disidentification-Recognizing that your mind is just your mind and your thoughts are just your thoughts; they are not equal to your identity

Externalizing-Treating your thoughts as if they were an external person

Mindfulness-Just noticing thoughts or patterns of thinking rather than believing them or getting swept up in them

Challenge Thoughts

Use counterarguments-Challenge unhelpful thoughts with facts that contradict them

Make slight shifts in your self-talk or thoughts-Instead of all or nothing self-talk, change it to mostly, usually, rarely, and so on; Instead of "why", change it to "how can I" and so on

Ask yourself:

Is that the way it is or have I added my interpretation to it?

What evidence is there to support that view and is there any counterevidence or is it impossible to know one way or the other right now what the truth is?

Is it partially that way and partially not that way you have been viewing it or thinking about it?

How is it for you and what do you do when you think about it that way?

Is that helpful, effective or pleasant or unhelpful, ineffective and unpleasant?

If the way it was were opposite of the way you have been thinking about it or seeing it, what would you do and how would you feel?

Would you be willing to try, on an experimental basis, to act on or try on this opposite point of view or thought?

Just the Facts

Use observational/sensory-based descriptions-This helps to separate interpretations and imposed meanings from what happens; only describe what you could see or hear on a videotape about the

situation or yourself

Go with the Thoughts Rather Than Fight or Oppose Them

Accept and soften towards one's thoughts-Don't oppose or react; opposing gives the unhelpful thoughts energy; What you resist tends to persist.

Exaggerate-Amplify negative or fearful thoughts until they are absurd or lose their power

Get Into Dialogue and Out of Monologue

With another/others-Talking to another person or several others can sometimes get you on a new track, provide a reality check and help you get perspective on your thoughts

With self/thoughts-Instead of accepting, fighting with or being dominated by unhelpful thoughts, engage in a dialogue with yourself or the thoughts and, as in conversations with others, new thoughts or perspectives might occur

Take Actions

Do something that is incompatible with the unhelpful thought-Take an action that wouldn't be expected given the unhelpful thought

Do something to refute the unhelpful thought-Engage in some action that would disprove the unhelpful thought

Action can help you get unstuck and move out of the thought-Don't just sit there, do something; being in a different environment, moving your physical body and other actions can sometimes break you out of your mental rut