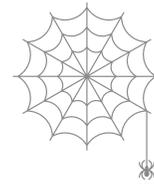


Getting Distance from Your Thinking Traps



It's not always necessary to challenge your thinking traps. Sometimes just noticing and getting distance from them can make a big difference. With distance, we become aware of other possibilities. We notice the difference between perceptions and facts. Here are some strategies for getting distance.

- ➔ **Get to know your mind.** Look at the list of thinking traps and identify the ones your mind falls into. See if you can find other traps of your own that aren't on the list.
- ➔ **Practice mindfulness of thoughts.** Develop a practice of watching your mind as it works. Imagine there is a small distance between you and your thoughts, and watch them like you might watch words or images on a computer screen.
- ➔ **Acknowledge your thoughts.** When a thinking trap like catastrophizing shows up, simply notice it and label it. "I notice my mind is catastrophizing again."
- ➔ **Don't fight your thoughts.** Let them be. When you try to suppress a thought, it can become stronger.
- ➔ **Examine their utility.** Ask yourself if this way of thinking is useful in the current situation. Or, is this thought a hammer when you need a screwdriver? Is it really helping?
- ➔ **Notice their history.** Ask yourself if this way of thinking has been showing up in your mind for a while. How far back in your life does this thinking pattern go? For example, you may notice that a thought like "I'm not doing enough" has been hanging around since you were a child
- ➔ **Is your thought a habit?** Ask yourself if you tend to think similar thoughts in similar situations. For example, when times are stressful, do you tend to assume the worst?
- ➔ **Thank your mind.** When your mind offers you thinking traps, it's just doing what minds do: trying to protect you from threats. Thank your mind for that thought: "Thanks, mind. You're just doing what you're built to do!" The idea isn't to mock your mind, but to truly acknowledge the purpose of your thinking.
- ➔ **Sing your thoughts.** Use a familiar tune like "Happy Birthday" or "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star." See if it gives you a sense of freedom from the thought.
- ➔ **Externalize the thought.** Write the thought down and look at it from a distance. Write it on a 3 x 5 card or sticky note and carry it around with you throughout the day. It can be a passenger on your journey, but it doesn't have to be in charge.
- ➔ **Be skeptical.** Treat your thoughts like hypotheses, not truths.