

S.T.O.P.P.-ing Distress

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When you are experiencing heightened mental health distress and feel out of control, it can be useful to S.T.O.P.P. This skill will help you to stop for a minute to check in with yourself, and will help you to identify what steps you can take next.



S

STOP Just pause for a moment.



T

TAKE A BREATH Notice your breathing as you breathe in and out. In through the nose, out through the mouth.



O

OBSERVE

What thoughts are going through your mind right now?
Where is your focus of attention?
What are you reacting to?
What sensations do you notice in your body?



P

PULL BACK - PUT IN SOME PERSPECTIVE

DON'T BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU THINK!
What's the bigger picture?
Take the helicopter view.
What is another way of looking at this situation?
What advice would I give a friend?
What would a trusted friend say to me right now?
Is this thought a fact or opinion?
What is a more reasonable explanation?
How important is this? How important will it be in 6 months time?
It will pass.



P

PRACTICE WHAT WORKS - PROCEED

What is the best thing to do right now?
What is the most helpful thing for me, for others, for the situation?
What can I do that fits with my values?
Where can I focus my attention right now?
Do what will be effective and appropriate.

HOW TO USE STOPP

Practice the first two steps often for a few days - many times every day at any time.

Read through the steps often.

Carry written reminders with you.

Practice STOPP by running through all the steps several times a day, every day... even when you don't need it.

Start to use it for little upsets.

Gradually, you will find that you can use it for more distressing situations. Like any new habit or skill, it will become automatic over time.

The steps explained

Stop! Say it to yourself, in your head, as soon as you notice your mind and/or your body is reacting to a trigger.

Stop! helps to put in the space between the stimulus (the trigger, whatever we are reacting to) and our response.

The earlier you use STOPP, the easier and more effective it will be.

Take a Breath. Breathing a little deeper and slower will calm down and reduce the physical reaction of emotion/adrenaline. In through the nose, out through our mouth - the brain's reset mechanism.

Focusing on our breathing means we are not so focused on the thoughts and feelings of the distress, so that our minds can start to clear and we can think more logically and rationally.

Observe. We can notice the thoughts going through our mind, we can notice what we feel in our body, and we can notice the urge to react in an impulsive way. We can notice the vicious cycle of anxiety, sadness or anger (etc).

Noticing helps us to defuse from those thoughts and feelings and therefore reduce their power and control.

Pull back / Put in some Perspective. The thought challenging of CBT. Thinking differently. Don't believe everything you think! Thoughts are thoughts - NOT statements of fact.

When we step back emotionally from a situation, and start to see the bigger picture, it reduces those distressing beliefs. We can do this by asking ourselves questions.

Practice what works / Proceed. This is the behavioural change of CBT. Doing things differently. Rather than reacting impulsively with unhelpful consequences, we can CHOOSE our more helpful and positive response. Shift our focus of attention.

Adapted from: <https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/stopp.htm>

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