

# Stress Coping Strategy

## Thought and Feelings Stopping Procedure

Your personal reference guide to the SCS procedure.

### THE PROCEDURE

## Your Stress Coping Strategy

Work through each step in sequence. With practice this will become second nature.

1. **Stop!** Say this assertively in your internal dialogue. Interrupt the thought firmly.
2. **Red traffic light.** Imagine or visualise a red traffic light clearly in your mind.
3. **Your favourite place of relaxation.** Imagine yourself there. Feel it. Let yourself arrive.
4. **Hold that place in your mind** and move into Loop Breathing below.

### LOOP BREATHING

## The Breathing Technique

Loop breathing works by directly reversing the physiological stress response. Breathing in this way signals safety to your nervous system and begins to reduce stress hormones quickly.

- Breathe in** through your nose, counting to three, until your lungs are full.
- Breathe out** through your nose, counting to ten, until your lungs are empty.
- No gap** between the in-breath and the out-breath.

Complete five repetitions, then move on to self-hypnosis.

*If you feel lightheaded at any point, move straight on to self-hypnosis.*

Once you are comfortable with the procedure, gradually increase to ten repetitions.

### UNDERSTANDING THE SCIENCE

## Why Your Body Responds This Way

The following explains what is happening in your body and mind when you experience stress, anxiety or intrusive thoughts. Understanding this can help you approach the process with more patience and less judgment.

- A) Your breathing pattern is signalling to your mind that you may be under threat.
- B) Your mind is preparing your body for fight, flight or freeze.
- C) In this state, your body prioritises survival. It temporarily reduces functions it considers non-essential - calm thinking, memory, sleep, digestion - because these are not needed when facing immediate danger.
- D) Whether the threat is real or perceived, your physiological response is identical. Your body does not distinguish between the two.
- E) This is a survival mechanism developed over thousands of years. It cannot and should not be removed, but you can reduce your sensitivity to certain triggers, so that everyday challenges no longer activate it so intensely.
- F) The older, more instinctive part of your brain is not designed to process the complexities of modern life. It responds to threat, not to nuance.
- G) As far as your brain and body are concerned in that moment, you are being physically attacked.
- H) In this state, intrusive and worrying thoughts are entirely normal. They are there to protect you, even when they feel very uncomfortable.
- I) Thousands of years ago, it was the careful, vigilant people who survived. You are proving that your nervous system is working exactly as it was designed to.
- J) Your sensitivity may feel like a problem, but it is simply a well-trained nervous system that has learned to be alert. We are going to retrain it together.
- K) The instinctive part of your brain does not differentiate between real and imagined threats. If you think it, that is real enough for your body to respond.

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### THE PHYSICAL RESPONSE

## What Happens in Your Body

- L) A little over-sensitivity causes your mind to dramatise events. Your breathing changes, your mouth becomes dry, your body temperature shifts and your muscles tighten.
- M) Much of this is hormonal. That is how your body changes gear to deal with a perceived attack. These symptoms are what we commonly call stress.
- N) Over time, sustained stress hormones can suppress the immune system and affect the smooth muscles, including those that control the bladder and the bowel. It is entirely normal to find you need the bathroom more often when you are stressed.
- O) Much of this can be managed and reversed. The approach we are building together will help return your body to its natural equilibrium.
- P) You have spent time, perhaps years, practising anxiety, vigilance and stress. With the same consistency and commitment, you can learn to be relaxed. It is simply a different habit.

*The behavioural approach we are using is not always enough on its own. If your thoughts remain irrational or distressing, we can work with techniques to rationalise your thinking. You will be the first to know when you need more support, and we are here for that.*

## The Beliefs That Maintain Stress

If your thoughts are calmer and more rational, you are making progress. If you are still experiencing distressing or irrational thoughts, please know that we can work on these together using CBT.

The most common irrational beliefs tend to cluster around a single word: MUST. Watch for thoughts like:

*“The world must be easy.”*

*“I must be successful.”*

*“People must treat me with respect.”*

*“Things must go the way I expect.”*

The common thread is the word MUST. When the world does not meet these expectations, the result is frustration, anxiety and distress. We can work with these beliefs and replace them with more flexible, rational thinking, and you will feel better for it.

*From today, we will focus only on what we want. We have no intention of achieving what we do not want, so we are choosing to withdraw our attention from it, and give that energy instead to the thinking that moves us forward.*

If you have any questions about the SCS or your practice, please do not wait until your next appointment. Reach out to us anytime.

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