



International
Wellbeing Insights
People, Culture & Wellbeing



Stress Management Society
from distress to de-stress

Simon-Kucher

‘What If..?’ Thinking Online Workshop

For further information, please contact

International Wellbeing Insights +44 203 142 8650

support@stress.org.uk

SIMON • KUCHER & PARTNERS

Strategy & Marketing Consultants



Contents

Welcome.....	3
Flawed Strategies for ‘What if...’ Thinking.....	4
Negative Thought Patterns.....	5
Step One: Defuse.....	7
Name it To Tame it Technique.....	8
Step Two: Defy.....	9
Step Three: Direct.....	10
De-Catastrophising.....	11
Support Resources.....	12
Action Plan.....	13
About International Wellbeing Insights.....	14
Notes.....	15

WELCOME

Stress is the driving force that keeps us on our toes and ensures that we push to be the best we can be. However that is only valid up to a certain point. If we have too much stress and endless wear and tear, it can drive us into physical, mental and emotional exhaustion.

Certainly we can't avoid the problem. Situations arise on a day-to-day basis, which make physical, mental and emotional demands on us. There may be decisions that need to be made, deadlines that need to be met, and lessons to be learned.

Unreasonable stress affects one in five of the working population and after acute medical conditions it is the most common cause of long term sickness absence from work (CIPD Absence Management 2020).

Stress undoubtedly makes people ill. It is now known to contribute to heart disease, hypertension and high blood pressure, it affects the immune system, is linked to strokes, IBS (Irritable Bowel Syndrome), ulcers, diabetes, muscle and joint pain, miscarriage, allergies, alopecia and even premature tooth loss.

Therefore it is imperative to strike the right balance. As individuals, we must take stock of all aspects of our life and situations and learn to cope better.

Treat it early, and your prospects are good. Ignore the problem, and there is a risk that 'burnout' may become a permanent state of affairs.





FLAWED STRATEGIES FOR 'WHAT IF...' THINKING

We naturally fall back on our common strategies to attempt to stop the thoughts and 'numb the pain' in the short term but usually serve to make things worse in the long term. It doesn't fix the problem at its core.

Typical flawed strategies fall into the three groups:

DISTRACTIONS

Otherwise known as 'Ostrich Syndrome' - burying our heads in the sand: "It's not happening, la-la-la!"

DIVERSIONS

Procrastination - ANYTHING but facing or dealing with main issue.

DWELLING

Wallowing in thought loops and 'dragging ourselves over the coals', gradually more and more paralysed with self-pity

Struggling with, or trying to drown out or push away unhelpful thoughts only amplifies them and makes things worse. **So, what could we do instead?**

THE 3D's: WHAT COULD YOU DO INSTEAD?

1. DEFUSE



2. DEFY



3. DIRECT



NEGATIVE THOUGHT PATTERNS

It's important to be able to recognise some types of unhelpful thinking styles that may arise.

Some common negative thinking patterns include:

ANXIOUS THOUGHTS AND WORRY

- Catastrophic thinking, imagined doomsday scenarios
- Worry is when the mind projects into an imagined future and conjures up scenes and thoughts about what could go wrong
- Sometimes it takes the form of imagining or expecting that bad things will happen or nothing good will ever happen for you
- You might focus on the lack in your life and believe that nothing will ever get better for you
- You might fret about your health deteriorating, relationship breakdowns, car breakdowns — even though nothing has actually happened yet

CRITICISM

- Constantly criticising yourself and wanting to improve because you're "not good enough"... yet
- You may be very harsh on yourself, focusing in on all of your weaknesses and perceived flaws
- Negative self-talk and self-criticism often results in low self-esteem and a lack of confidence
- There is nothing wrong with having goals and aiming higher – it's about the motivation; we can choose to do those because they are good for us or we want to grow
- It's a very different mindset to be doing those things because we don't feel like we're enough yet
- When we focus solely on what is wrong with ourselves (and our lives), we tend to disassociate from what is going well and what is good, we can then become stuck in a cycle of negativity

NEGATIVE THOUGHT PATTERNS

It's important to be able to recognise some types of unhelpful thinking styles that may arise.

Common negative thinking patterns continued:

REGRET, REMORSE AND GUILT

- Pondering on 'mistakes' made in the past often creates feelings of shame, guilt and negativity
- Feelings of worthlessness may arise when we play over and over in our minds, the 'bad' choices or 'wrong' actions we feel we have made
- There is nothing 'negative' about evaluating past experiences; this is how we can learn, grow and mature as people
- Negativity arises when we dwell on a situation repeatedly, caught in a thought loop, with no real intention to learn and grow – but punishing ourselves or wishing things were different instead of accepting things as they are

PROBLEMS

- Negative thoughts often revolve around what's wrong with our lives and our attention becomes preoccupied with and exaggerates the perceived negative aspects of our lives
- We downplay what's going well
- If you have this problem of laminating over your sorrows and problems you may constantly feel frustrated, anxious, depressed and apathetic
- When you're so absorbed in what's wrong, you're unable to notice what's right



WHAT CAN YOU DO? STEP ONE: DEFUSE

Recognise and step back from negative thought patterns by using cognitive defusion.

- Negative thought patterns are repetitive, unhelpful thoughts. They directly cause what we could describe as 'negative' (unwanted or unpleasant) emotions like anxiety, depression, stress, fear, unworthiness, shame etc.
- Once we learn to recognise and identify negative thought patterns as they occur, we can start to step back from them
- This process is called 'cognitive defusion'

COGNITIVE FUSION VS COGNITIVE DEFUSION

COGNITIVE FUSION:

Cognitive fusion is when we are attached to our thoughts and feelings. When we are fused with our thoughts (cognitive fusion) we tend to take our thoughts as facts. We believe them, buy into and obey them – we then manifest them.

It's completely normal to have negative thoughts, everyone has them! We all have minds that have evolved to be constantly on the lookout for problems and dangers, (it's trying to keep you safe from harm) so most of us have minds prone to have many negative thoughts.

The problem is when we believe that our negative thoughts are true. If you believe the thought "What a horrible day", (cognitive fusion) then you probably will play that out - if you believe it, you will achieve it.

COGNITIVE DEFUSION:

In cognitive defusion we learn to see the thoughts in our head as simply that — just thoughts. Not reality. When we are not fused with our thoughts — when we can step back into cognitive defusion.

When you are no longer entangled in thoughts they lose their grip on you and lose their power to generate unpleasant emotions

- We're no longer attached to them
- We only listen to them if we find them valuable or helpful
- We certainly don't take our thoughts to be 'the truth' and we don't automatically obey them or play them out
- We have a choice in how we choose to respond to them

The ability to recognise unhelpful thinking and step back from it is incredibly empowering. It can change the quality of your whole day and your whole life.

WHAT CAN YOU DO? STEP ONE: DEFUSE

COGNITIVE DEFUSION TECHNIQUE: 'NAME IT TO TAME IT'

People often feel hopeless when trapped in negative thinking because they may wrestle or argue with thoughts and push them away. Research shows that trying to struggle with thoughts in those ways just amplifies them.

The 'name it to tame it' technique coined by psychiatrist **Dr. Daniel Siegel** is a simple, powerful tool to help untangle from thoughts without struggling with them.

Step 1:

- When an unhelpful thought pattern and associated emotion arises; mentally label the 'story' in a soothing, kind tone
- The tone is important as it helps you to settle and invites compassion and soothing into the moment instead of something negative

Step 2:

- When thoughts along that storyline arise again, simply mentally note that it has come up again and then let it go

By 'letting go', you stop giving the thought all of your attention. You realise that it's just a thought, not reality and open your awareness to the world again. Get out of your head!

As soon as you name the story/thought/emotion, you have now stepped back from being caught up in it and defused it. You have initiated cognitive defusion.



WHAT CAN YOU DO? STEP TWO: DEFY

Challenge your unhelpful thoughts! 'Helpful questions, helpful thoughts' is another tool to help you untangle from your thoughts and change your focus. These are drawn from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT).

At any time, pick one of the below questions to mentally question the negative thoughts and untangle from the thought:

- IS THIS THOUGHT IN ANY WAY USEFUL OR HELPFUL?
- IS IT TRUE? (CAN I ABSOLUTELY KNOW THAT IT'S TRUE)
- IS THIS JUST AN OLD STORY THAT MY MIND IS PLAYING OUT OF HABIT?
- DOES THIS THOUGHT HELP ME TAKE EFFECTIVE ACTION?

Now (again picking one from the below list) you can use these questions to create a new focus and new possibilities. Focusing on constructive thoughts and actions and helping you to effectively face day-to-day challenges:

- WHAT IS THE TRUTH? MY DEEPEST TRUTH?
- HOW CAN I MAKE THE BEST OF THIS SITUATION?
- WHAT DO I REALLY WANT FROM THIS SITUATION? HOW CAN I MOVE TOWARDS THAT?
- WHO WOULD I BE WITHOUT THIS NEGATIVE THOUGHT?
- WHAT NEW STORY OR THOUGHT CAN I FOCUS ON NOW?
- HOW CAN I SEE THIS IN A DIFFERENT OR NEW WAY?
- WHAT CAN I BE GRATEFUL FOR IN THIS MOMENT?

These powerful questions can help you to change your focus from negativity to focusing on what's going well whilst also taking constructive action.

Constructive thinking allows for:

- Happiness when things are going well
- Feeling calm and clear headed when problems arise by putting them into perspective and dealing with them practically and efficiently

WHAT CAN YOU DO? STEP THREE: DIRECT

Most negative thoughts flow from two directions:

1. **DWELLING ON THE PAST**—do you ruminate over mistakes, problems, guilt, anything that didn't go how you wanted it to?
2. **WORRYING ABOUT THE FUTURE**—do you fear what may or may not happen for yourself, others or the planet?

Whatever your negative thoughts may be, have you noticed that in order to engage in the negative thought pattern, the mind needs to cast its focus into past or future. Either that or we judge and mentally label things in the present moment as 'bad'.

When in negative thinking we tend to lose touch with the present moment and what is actually happening now.

'Coming To Your Senses'

A powerful method to help you become more present and step out of negative thinking is the 'come to your senses' technique, a form of mindfulness practice. Simply redirect your attention and bring your focus to your sense perceptions

- Wherever you are, notice everything around you
- Use your sense to the fullest
- Just be aware of what you are experiencing in this moment: What can you hear? What can you smell? What can you feel?

This is an effective way to ease any internal 'noise' and pay attention to the present moment. Here there is no room left in our attention for excessive unhelpful thinking.

You can use this technique and many other mindfulness exercises to calm your mind when you find yourself caught up in negative thinking.

DE-CATASTROPHISING

COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS ARE IRRATIONAL THOUGHTS THAT HAVE THE POWER TO INFLUENCE HOW YOU THINK AND FEEL.

WE ALL HAVE SOME COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS - THEY'RE A NORMAL PART OF BEING HUMAN. HOWEVER, WHEN COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS ARE TOO FREQUENT, HABITUAL OR EXTREME, THEY CAN BE HARMFUL.

ONE TYPE OF COGNITIVE DISTORTION IS CALLED CATASTROPHISING. WHEN CATASTROPHISING, THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PROBLEM IS EXAGGERATED, OR THE WORST POSSIBLE OUTCOME IS ASSUMED TO BE TRUE.

BY LEARNING TO QUESTION YOUR OWN THOUGHTS, YOU CAN CORRECT MANY OF THESE COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS.

WHAT IS THE WORRY?

HOW LIKELY IS IT THAT YOUR WORRY WILL COME TRUE?

GIVE EXAMPLES OF PAST EXPERIENCES, OR OTHER EVIDENCE, TO SUPPORT YOUR ANSWER:

IF YOUR WORRY BECOMES TRUE, WHAT'S THE WORST THAT COULD HAPPEN?

IF YOUR WORRY BECOMES TRUE, WHAT'S MOST LIKELY TO HAPPEN?

IF YOUR WORRY BECOMES TRUE, WHAT ARE THE CHANCES YOU'LL BE OK?

IN A WEEK?

%

IN A MONTH?

%

IN A YEAR?

%

LET'S SAY IT DID: WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF IT HAPPENED?

SUPPORT RESOURCES

MENTAL WELLNESS/HEALTH PAGE

- Please visit your intranet for more information on burnout prevention and stress management: <https://portal.simon-kucher.com/sites/hr/Pages/BurnoutPreventionStressManagement.aspx>
- Here you will also find information on:
 - Training and learning resources
 - Local support by country
 - Internal support by country
 - General health resources
 - Ombudspeople

HEADSPACE

- Simon-Kucher & Partners have recently introduced Headspace for employee use. Please visit <https://work.headspace.com/simon-kucher-and-partners/member-enroll>

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO)

- WHO work to improve the mental health of individuals and society at large
- Find further information here regarding mental wellbeing and mental disorders
- https://www.who.int/mental_health/en/

Take personal
responsibility to get the
individual support you
need

MY 'WHAT IF...' ACTION PLAN

THINK OF THREE COMMITMENTS YOU ARE GOING TO TAKE TO ENSURE YOU ARE GOING TO MINIMISE GETTING STUCK IN THE CYCLE OF WHAT IF THINKING.

THIS IS ABOUT STRATEGY: MAKE YOUR ACTIONS FOCUSED ON THE THREE D'S OF:

1. DEFUSE



2. DEFY



3. DIRECT



FOR EXAMPLE, "WHEN I START TO FALL INTO 'WHAT IF...?' THINKING, I AM GOING TO REFLECT AND QUESTION WHAT I AM FEELING & THINKING", OR "I WILL PRACTICE LABELLING MY NEGATIVE THOUGHTS WHEN THEY ARISE TO HELP ME REALISE THEY ARE ONLY THOUGHTS AND THEN LET THEM GO"

ACTION POINT 1: (DEFUSE): I WILL...

ACTION POINT 2 : (DEFY) I WILL...

ACTION POINT 3 : (DIRECT) I WILL...

ABOUT INTERNATIONAL WELLBEING INSIGHTS

Stress is a much used (and abused) term these days. You frequently hear people say “I’m stressed” or “I’m depressed”, yet there is still much confusion about what these terms actually mean and how best to tackle them. This is where we can help. We are the UK’s leading authority on stress management issues, which is why you will regularly hear us talking about this topic in the media.

International Wellbeing Insights is dedicated to leading effective universal change by maximising your resilience, happiness, productivity and success with our passionate approach to reducing stress and promoting wellbeing.

Our extensive knowledge of stress and wellbeing and our cutting edge interventions have made us the primary organisation dealing with work-related stress reduction and wellbeing promotion in the UK since 2003.

For years, we’ve been empowering individuals to take charge of their wellbeing through our workshops, guides and regular updates. We also act as a trusted advisor for many companies such as British Airways, Allianz and Shell, guiding them through the mental wellbeing solution maze.

For more information or to book a workshop or a coaching session see www.stress.org.uk, call +44 203 142 8650 or email info@stress.org.uk



NOTES

A large rectangular area defined by a dashed purple border, intended for taking notes.



International
Wellbeing Insights
People, Culture & Wellbeing

We provide a range of services across the UK and internationally. We are always happy to discuss how we can support you.

We look forward to supporting your wellbeing journey.

Find Us Here:

The Lighthouse
Suite S, Quay West
Salamander Quay
Harefield, Middlesex

Call Us On:

Switchboard: +44 (0) 203 142 8659

Email Us On:

info@stress.org.uk

Visit Us On:

www.stress.org.uk
www.wellbeing.work

We have supported many organisations, including:

