

## **Mindfulness of Thoughts**

### **Tips for this exercise:**

- Find somewhere quiet initially to help you practice. As you become more experienced it is useful to practice this whilst you are going about your daily routine, the usual distractions will be there and will increase your skills in noticing when your mind wanders.
- To practice, think of a way you might like to visualise letting go of your thoughts. Some examples include imagining sitting in a field and watching your thoughts float on clouds, putting them on leaves that float down a stream, watching a train go past and putting the thoughts on carriages, putting the thoughts on balloons. Try different methods and see which works best for you.
- It will be really helpful to practice this daily if you can.

### **Practice**

Find somewhere comfortable to sit and do this practice, turn off any distractions. Sit in an upright position with both feet on the floor and rest your hands on your lap, let your eyes rest with a soft focus somewhere in front of you.

Imagine you are in your chosen scenario, for example sitting on the bank of a stream, in a field watching the clouds, whatever. Notice what is around you (pause). Now bring your attention to the activity of your mind, notice your thoughts. Don't try to stop them, change them or block them, just observe and watch them come and go. Try not to judge the thoughts or criticise yourself for what comes up.

As you notice each thought, using whatever technique you have chosen, watch the thoughts float by a bit like you would watch a film. You might find the thoughts come as images, that's fine, just watch them float by. You might want to imagine yourself putting the thoughts on the vehicle you have chosen, for example putting the thoughts on to a leaf and watch it pass by down the stream. Just continue to watch your thoughts and allow them to pass by using whatever technique you have chosen.

You might find you get caught up in the thoughts. If you notice this is happening, gently return to your position on the bank, field etc watching the thoughts and let them pass by. Some thoughts might come up more than once, that's OK, just allow them to pass. Some thoughts may come in quick succession, that's OK too, just put them all on the leaf (cloud etc) and watch them pass. You may even have the thought "this is hard" or "I'm not having any thoughts", well try to recognise these as thoughts and let them go. Some thoughts may come as images or have emotions attached to them, again, just notice, watch and allow them to pass by without trying to change anything, judge yourself or block it.

Continue to watch the thoughts come and go. When you are ready to end the practice take a few deep breaths and slowly return your attention back to the room.

### **How can this be useful for me?**

When we experience distressing thoughts, it is easy to get "hooked" on them. That's is we get caught up in them and do not notice that we are no longer paying attention to what we want to. We can then begin to analyse them, they can quickly spiral and cause more distress. We start to take our thoughts as if they are factual, which can create more distress. This exercise will help you to become

more aware of your thoughts and judgements and notice when you are getting caught up in them. If we are more aware of our thoughts, we can choose which ones we want to focus on and which ones we want to let go of without obsessing over them. This technique is called thought diffusion (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999)

In everyday life, you can either continue to visualise putting the thoughts on leaves (or whatever you have practiced) or you can simply notice the thoughts and that your mind has wandered and gently return it to what you want to focus on. Some people find it useful to visualise putting the thoughts on leaves as this helps them “unhook” from the thoughts.

Hayes, S.C., Strosahl, K.D., & Wilson, K. G. (1999). *Acceptance and commitment therapy: An experiential approach to behaviour change*. New York: Guildford Press.