

# Distraction.

**Relevant to:** Depression:  Anxiety:  Irritability/Anger:  General emotional control: 

**'Distraction' is one of the key techniques for you to use in dealing with all forms of unwanted emotions. It simply means moving your focus from whatever is concerning you onto something else. So it is very simple, but it is also very fundamental - it determines what you are thinking about. What is more, you can get very skilled at it and it can become one of your favourite activities!**

Many people have spent so much time investigating the details of how to do distraction well that there is now a good body of knowledge about it. Here are some examples:

## Suppose you don't like travelling on a bus ...

What could you distract yourself with? Answer: Other people on the bus, looking at the shops you are going past, looking at cars you are going past, looking at people on the pavement outside the bus, and so on. Once you get good at this you don't (for example) simply look at the people on the pavement, you go a step further and wonder what they are doing, where they are going, what sort of homes they live in, and so on. You fully immerse yourself in them so that you are thoroughly distracted. You can then see that this technique amounts to more than distraction, it becomes a pleasurable activity, so that in this case, the bus trip is not just tolerable it is enjoyable.

## Suppose you don't like queuing in the supermarkets ...

... as many people don't. What could you distract yourself with there? Answer: Other people in the supermarket, looking at the special offers that are near the checkout tills, gazing at the shopping that is being off-loaded onto the conveyer belts, and many more. (Note, you will notice that you sometimes have to be slightly subtle in how you engross your attention) for example, onto other people's goods. 'Gazing' seems to be acceptable, whilst 'staring' isn't. Again, with practice, distraction can become a great deal of fun. For example, by looking at what people are off loading onto their conveyer belts, you can play the game of building a picture of what house they live in.



## Suppose you get anxious when you go to the dentist ...

... as many people do. This one is slightly unusual, because, for most people, distracting yourself with something other than what is going on in your mouth doesn't work. The phenomenon of having a drill in your mouth usually overwhelms any other thought. So, curiously, one of the most effective things to concentrate on is to rate the pain you are suffering! Why? Because, for the most part, when you go to the dentist you suffer very little pain indeed. It is your imagination that makes the whole experience so unpleasant. So, put your imagination to one side, and concentrate on rating out of ten how much pain you are actually feeling. You will be very pleasantly surprised.

## Suppose you get anxious when you are with other people ...

... especially groups of strangers, which many people are. What might you distract yourself within such a situation? Answer: The people you are mixing with. 'Distraction' in this case amounts to really concentrating on what the person you are talking to is saying. And, as so many times with distraction, this works especially well in your favour. If you can do this, your anxieties take a back seat and you automatically feel you want to say something.



### In Session:

In discussion with one or two of your neighbours, decide on a fifth example similar to the four we have covered. Then work out what could be the distraction - just like the examples. Tip: don't worry if you can't do it! Your tutor might help, or maybe others will have better luck.

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Which situation do you think you could use distraction beneficially? What distraction would you use?

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### Project.

The best project for you to do on distraction is to first work out what makes you worried. For example, going to the dentist or mixing with other people. Then, plan out how you are going to distract yourself most effectively and most pleasurably. The above examples will probably give you a good clue. Thirdly, and most importantly, go out and practice. Don't be put off if you are not particularly good first time out. Distraction is a terrifically good technique that doesn't just 'take your mind off' the difficult situation it positively helps you to enjoy it. Here is a space for notes if you want it:

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### Mythbuster.

If you are sad or worried or angry it is good to spend lots of time thinking about it.

**Wrong.**

If you have a problem, it is good to sort it out. But it is not good just to spend time thinking thoughts that bother you.