

APA: Thought Stopping



Thought Stopping is a technique you can employ to combat or eliminate negative and self-defeating thinking. This technique can be especially helpful with rumination, and with deeply entrenched patterns of negative thinking. The procedure is fairly simple and has only a few steps which are as follows:

1. Make a list of the self-statements that you make that are negative, critical and self-defeating. For example, you might believe you are stupid because you don't understand computers and have failed to acquire basic computer skills despite having read a book and being taught by friends. Your critical, self-defeating thought might be, *"I'm such an idiot, everyone else seem to know how to use computers but me."*
2. Make another list of replacement thoughts that are realistic, appropriate and positive. For example, *"It's true I am having difficulty developing computer skill, but there are many other things that I do well and can feel proud about."*
3. Wear a loose-fitting rubber band around one wrist.
4. Whenever you think a negative self-statement, do the following:
 - Ⓧ Gently snap the rubber band
 - Ⓧ Focus on the slight sting in your wrist
 - Ⓧ Silently say the word **"STOP"**
 - Ⓧ Then think the realistic, positive thought
 - Ⓧ Congratulate yourself with a compliment
5. Use this technique as often as necessary to eliminate unwanted, negative thinking. Eventually, you will no longer need the rubber band. The word **"STOP"** will suffice as a means of eliminating negative thinking.
6. If you prefer not to use the rubber band, you can still do effective thought stopping by simply saying the word **"STOP"** and replacing the negative thought with the more realistic, positive thought.
7. Some individuals are more **"visual thinkers"**, and find that pairing a visual image with the word **"STOP"** can enhance the effectiveness of this technique. For example, you might image a red Stop Sign when you say the word **"STOP"**.
8. It is helpful to think of Thought Stopping as a method of changing a dysfunctional habit. Just as it takes time to develop a habit, it also takes time to change a negative habit and replace it with a positive more constructive habit.
9. Long standing patterns of negative thinking can take a period of time to change with Thought Stopping. It may take a number of weeks or even months to change very stubborn patterns of negative thinking with Thought Stopping. Nevertheless, we have seen clients have good success when they have been willing to be persistent with this technique. **Don't give up** – Stay with the practice and be willing to be more stubborn than the dysfunctional pattern of thinking!

