



## Distract Your Thoughts

*“Whether you think you can, or you think you can’t, you are right.” – Henry Ford*

The human brain is an incredible thought making machine. That is its job, and it does it well. The problem is when we believe everything we think. We tend to latch on to negative thoughts while quickly dismissing good thoughts. Once the brain gets on a roll and feelings get involved, it has tremendous force. Trying to stop thoughts can be difficult. For example, don’t think of a pink elephant right now. Really, don’t think of a pink elephant. Can you stop thinking of a pink elephant? Most likely you are thinking of a pink elephant right now even though I told you not to.

Rather than trying to not think something, it can be easier to distract yourself. Put a checkmark next to the following prompts that you are willing to do next time you find yourself stuck thinking about something negative you don’t want to be thinking about.

\_\_\_ Remember events from your past that were pleasant, fun, or exciting. Try to remember as many details as possible about these happy memories. What did you do? Who were you with? What happened? What did it feel like? What did it smell like? What did it sound like? Try to recreate the scene in your imagination and body as fully as you can.

\_\_\_ Look outside at the natural world around you. Observe the flowers, trees, sky, and landscape as closely as you can. Observe any animals that are around. Listen to the sounds they make. Or you can imagine a natural scene that you have been to and really enjoyed. What do you notice? What is beautiful? What draws your attention? Spend time with it and soak it in.

\_\_\_ Imagine yourself as a hero or heroine correcting some past or future event in your life. How would you do it? What would people say to you?

\_\_\_ Imagine yourself getting praise from someone whose opinion matters to you. What did you do? What does this person say to you? Why does this person’s opinion matter to you? How does it feel to hear this?

\_\_\_ Imagine your wildest fantasy coming true. What would it be? It can be anything, don’t limit yourself or judge it. Who else would be involved? What would you do afterwards?

\_\_\_ Keep a copy of your favorite prayer, saying, or quote with you. Then when you feel distressed, take it out and read it to yourself. Imagine the words calming and soothing you. Use imagery (such as nature, sunlight, or a white light coming down from heaven or the universe) that soothes you as you read the words.

\_\_\_ Other ideas: \_\_\_\_\_  
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Adapted from *The Dialectical Behavior Therapy Skills Workbook* by McKay, Wood, and Brantley. (2007).