

EXTRA ACTIVITY

Defusing Poisonous Words

This activity involves separating a word from its meaning, so that a spoken word becomes just a sound. The activity uses constant repetition – the technique we demonstrated in the film with ‘Paper, Paper, Paper’ – to produce ‘de-fusion’. This strategy helps us to recognise that spoken words are ‘just sounds’ (just as written words are only ‘marks on paper’).

Separating a word from ‘the real thing’ in this way reduces the emotional impact of the word, which can be helpful if you find a word particularly distressing. The constant repetition technique can remove the “sting” from a word that hurts you – a ‘poisonous’ word. So think whether there is a particular word that upsets you (perhaps a word that someone has used to insult you, for example, or an abusive word that you sometimes call yourself). Words that are emotionally wounding to a lot of people include “Idiot”, “Scum”, “Slut”, “Waster” and worse. See if you can identify a word that you find personally very hurtful, and use this in the activity.

Find a place where you won’t be disturbed and where you won’t be heard by anyone. Then time yourself for 30-40 seconds as you say your poisonous word out loud, clearly but as fast as you can. As you get into your stride, the word will begin to ‘feel’ very different and the repetitions will blend into one another so that your speech just becomes a stream of sound. As this sound pattern “takes over”, the word itself will lose its meaning, so that it becomes neutralised and less ‘toxic’. Researchers have shown that this very short and simple activity is often effective in reducing the emotional impact of a distressing word. You can repeat the activity a number of times, at intervals, using the same word or different upsetting words. The timing for this task is important – so keep your constant repetitions to 30-40 seconds.

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Defusion by Sound Control

This is another defusion technique that can take the 'sting' or the 'poison' out of words – in this case whole phrases or short sentences, not just single words. Having identified a hurtful statement, you can then achieve defusion by speaking (or singing!) the words out loud in various distorted ways. Focusing on the sound, rather than on the meaning, and deliberately distorting the sound, effectively neutralises the statement, greatly reducing its power to hurt you. The sound-distortion techniques used are simple. They may seem 'a bit odd' but this 'oddness' is deliberate, because making a hurtful statement sound odd will reduce its power to upset you. However, the 'oddness' means that you **MUST** do this activity in private!

First, identify a statement that you find personally distressing. Examples are...

"I'm such a wimp" "I always make mistakes"
 "Everyone hates me" "I'm just hopeless"

When you have identified a statement you want to work with, find an opportunity to spend 10 minutes or so somewhere where you won't be disturbed and can't be overheard.

First, say the statement out loud in your normal voice, and repeat this a number of times.

Then repeat the statement again, 5 times, but using one of the standard distortions described below. Being alone, you'll be able to let yourself go. Distorting the sound in an extreme way (the more extreme the better) will have the effect of separating the sounds of the words from their meaning. After using one distortion style, you might like to try another. It's good to repeat the whole activity a number of times using the same statement before going on to bring in other distressing statements you would like to neutralise in this way.

Here are the instructions for three types of distortion (feel free to vary them – have fun!)

De-fusing Distortion Style 1

Everrrr Sooooo Slowwww

Repeat the statement out loud a number of times, very, very slowly. Slow it down to a quarter of the normal speed, or even slower.

De-fusing Distortion Style 2

Use a Very Different Voice

Repeat the statement out loud a number of times in a voice that is very different from your own. For example, you might say it in an extreme high or low pitch, or with a pronounced foreign accent, or with a weird alien or cartoon voice. Any of these methods will take the focus away from the meaning of the statement and focus the attention only on the sound – thus bringing about defusion and 'de-toxifying' the distressing statement.

De-fusing Distortion Style 3

Turn it into a Song

This distortion style involves using the distressing statement as the repeated line of a song. Sing the words out loud, maybe in a pop or operatic style, using a tune of your own, a nursery rhyme melody, or a familiar tune such as "Happy Birthday".

ANOTHER DEFUSION ACTIVITY

Floating Leaves on a Moving Stream

Get into a comfortable position, close your eyes if you are comfortable doing this, and imagine that you are sitting on the bank of a river, watching the water flowing slowly. Notice how, as the water gently runs downstream, a large leaf occasionally drops from a tall tree onto the water until it floats and is gently carried away. Watch as a leaf starts to move, passes you by and is then carried further downstream until it goes out of sight.

As you continue to imagine this, thoughts and feelings may arise. If this happens, imagine gently placing the thought or feeling on the leaf, as a word or phrase, or as a picture. Watch then as the leaf continues its journey, carrying the word or image downstream until it eventually disappears from view. Continue with this activity for 10 minutes or so.

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Mindful Activities

The Raisin

Take a raisin (a raisin is the classic object used for this activity, but if you don't have a raisin, find something solid and edible – a sweet, for example, or a grape). First, hold it and look at it, turning it around to see it from all angles. Keep looking at it in detail, examining it for at least a minute. See how the light reflects from the surface, notice any variations in the colouring, and the texture. Then slowly put it into your mouth and notice every sensation, how it feels, how it tastes, but do this without chewing it or biting into it. Let it rest, and then move it around your mouth, all the time noticing the sensations. Hold it inside your mouth, exploring it with your tongue, noticing its shape and its hardness and softness and then, when you have done this for several minutes, bite into it gently and notice how this leads to changes, and new sensations. Take your time, but eventually begin chewing. Do this very slowly, noticing all of the physical sensations and the various tastes that emerge. After a further few minutes, allow yourself to swallow, and focus on the sensations that this brings.

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Mindful Activities

Mindful Listening to the Silence

Even when it's silent, it's not really silent. There are always sounds – they may be tiny sounds, but if you listen carefully you will always be able to hear things. Settle down somewhere where it seems to be almost silent and just spend a minute or so listening to any “background” sounds. As you listen carefully and notice sounds in the background, bring these sounds to the forefront of your attention and listen – really listen!

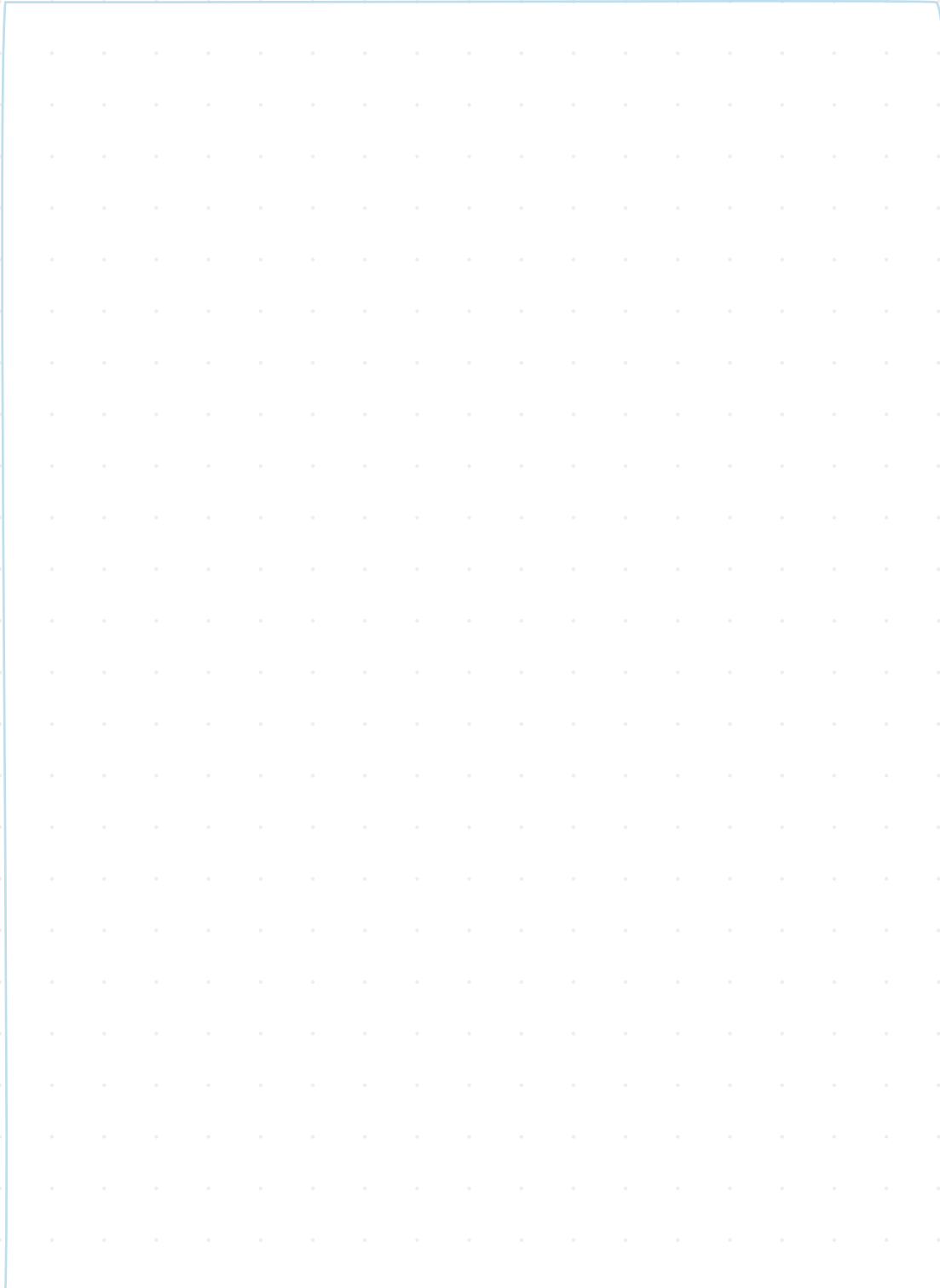
During this activity, your attention may wander so you start to think about other things and become aware of various feelings. Notice these things and just let them be – let them come and go naturally, and gently bring your attention back to the ‘silence’. You can do this activity as you go about your everyday routine. Wherever you are – and especially when it is relatively silent – tune in to the background sounds (the “ambient sounds”) and listen to them. Focus your attention gently on the ambient “soundscape” around you. There are so many sounds we never notice – until we make a Mindful effort to notice them.

Mindful Focus on Physical Support

This brief Mindful Activity is also something that you can do wherever you are and at almost any time. This means that you could do it several times a day. It involves noticing the sensations related to whatever is giving you physical support at that moment. At every single moment, wherever you are, and whether you're standing, sitting or lying down – you are being held up and supported ... by the chair you are sitting on, or the sofa or bed carrying your weight, or the ground beneath your feet. Most of the time, we are not aware of the sensations associated with this, but, as a Mindful Activity, we can always notice the sensations in the parts of our body that are being supported. So take time to notice, if you are standing, the sensations in your feet that come from being held up by the ground beneath you. If you are sitting, feel the sensations from the chair you are sitting on, and if you are lying down, feel the sensations from the sofa or bed carrying your weight. This is another example of ambient sensations always being present, but hardly ever being noticed, unless we Mindfully bring our attention to focus on them.

ACTivate Your Life – Notes

Use the space below to note any thoughts and feelings about your own issues and any relevant ideas and strategies that you have learned from the ACTivate Your Life course.



Because some of the notes you make on these sheets may be very sensitive, please make sure that you keep them in a safe and private place.