

1999

Thought Stopping

Rodger K. Bufford

George Fox University, rbufford@georgefox.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/gscp_fac

 Part of the [Psychology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bufford, Rodger K., "Thought Stopping" (1999). *Faculty Publications - Grad School of Clinical Psychology*. 302.
https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/gscp_fac/302

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School of Clinical Psychology at Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications - Grad School of Clinical Psychology by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact arolfe@georgefox.edu.

Thought Stopping. A behavioral technique used to help persons troubled by recurring uncontrolled thoughts and worries. Examples include obsessive rumination about cleanliness that persists even after careful washing, excessive fear of riding in automobiles or planes, and extreme fearfulness about being robbed or assaulted.

The basic technique involves four steps. First, the individual is asked to describe recent experiences in which the troublesome thoughts occurred. As the patient begins to describe the troublesome thoughts, the therapist suddenly and emphatically says *Stop*. This process is repeated several times. Second, the person is asked to imagine himself or herself in the unpleasant situation and to signal when he or she begins thinking obsessive thoughts. Again there are several repetitions of the procedure. When this step is complete, the therapist has developed control over the unwanted thoughts by means of the stop commands.

Third, the client is taught to say *Stop* aloud to his or her own thoughts. Typically the client initially makes a feeble and unconvincing effort and must be encouraged to be emphatic. Finally the person is told to think *Stop* in response to the troublesome thoughts.

The individual gradually experiences difficulty in thinking the troublesome thoughts and must be encouraged to make a conscious effort to produce them to facilitate the therapy process. This process permits additional exposure to the *Stop* command and helps the person learn to produce and eliminate the thought at will. This is especially important where the troubling thoughts are exaggerated forms of normal concerns, such as checking to see that the doors are locked.

Thought stopping is a form of aversion therapy that uses contingent punishment. Procedural variations include use of electric shock in place of the word *stop*, use of similar procedure to stop unwanted visual images, and use of thought stopping together with covert assertion. Although research on thought stopping is fairly limited, preliminary results are promising.

R. K. BUFFORD

See BEHAVIOR THERAPY; COGNITIVE-BEHAVIOR THERAPY.