



## **Dealing with unwanted thoughts, unpleasant memories or impressions**

Thoughts are sensitive to attention. By telling yourself that you shouldn't think about a particular thought, that thought only gets bigger. The attempt at avoiding it works against you. You unwittingly give it even more attention, making the thought even harder to shake. On the other end of the scale, completely ignoring the thought or pretending it isn't there doesn't work either. This time you are thinking: "I must ignore that thought", whereby you are actually thinking about exactly the thought you are trying to ignore! Both strategies make the unwanted thought even bigger than it was to start with, which is why "pushing the thought out of your mind" seldom works. So, what does work?

Many have found the following three-step technique effective:

1. Recognition
2. Acceptance
3. Parking

So you first recognise the thought ('Oh, there you are, I know you'). Next you accept it ('I know you are there. You're allowed to be here'). The last step is to park the thought ('I don't have time for you right now, I am busy with ...'). This way the thought receives minimal yet sufficient attention, without placing unnecessary stress on yourself. The three-step approach costs a lot less energy than avoiding or ignoring what you don't want to think about.

This strategy doesn't work straightaway and definitely not if you apply it only once. It needs to become second nature. So make it a habit by using it time and again. In the beginning it might not work at all, perhaps the thought will leave you for a few minutes. Gradually as you keep applying the same strategy the thought will receive less attention from you, ask less attention of you and finally lose its hold over you.

My recommendation: Use the strategy consistently for at least 21 days. That will give you sufficient time to notice whether it is effective for you or not.

In summary, use the following three steps in dealing with unwanted thoughts, unpleasant memories or impressions:

1. 'Oh, there you are, I know you' (recognition).
2. 'I know you're there, you're allowed to be here' (acceptance).
3. 'I am busy right now, I need to get on with what I was doing. I am busy with ...' (parking).