



Mindful of Stress

Thought Awareness Tool



Your growing awareness of your own stress pattern literally sends a signal from the higher brain to the lower brain to extinguish the conditioned fear response that sets off stress reactions. Here is how you build this awareness and use it to collapse the fear-based thinking that is behind most of the stress people experience.

1. **Throughout the day, be aware of any and all stressful, anxiety-provoking, pessimistic thoughts your mind generates** about people or events. **Notice the negative emotions these stressful thoughts carry** and the perception of threat they produce.
2. **As you bring the stressful thoughts you're thinking into awareness, don't try to dismiss or change them.** At first, simply observe what you're thinking, feeling, and believing. If you criticize yourself for thinking negatively, simply observe this as another stress-provoking thought.
3. When you've identified the stressful story your worried mind is believing, ask yourself: ***What is the core fear at the bottom of this stressful story.*** For example, it might be the fear of failing, or the fear of rejection, or the fear of loss, or having no control over a situation, or something else. When you have identified the core fear driving your stress reaction, tell yourself: **This thought or feeling is in me, not necessarily in reality.** Take a moment and see the truth in this. Let it sink in.
4. Next, challenge your fear by asking: ***How does my experience change when I don't believe this fearful thought and the outcome it pictures.*** At first, as you try to stop believing this thought, you might find your intellect insisting that what you fear is not mind-made but real. Persist in suspending judgment for the moment, achieving a simple, adventurous curiosity that wants to **see how your experience might actually change for the better.**

What you will discover is that a fearful thought has no power when you don't believe it. It doesn't turn into stress, anxiety, anger, or depression. It's just a thought that passes, leaving you in peace to recover your confidence and optimism.

5. **Remind yourself** that although stressful thoughts and feelings are *in you*, they are not you. They come and go like clouds, but the essence of your being is like the blue sky these clouds travel through and sometimes cover. Let your mind go completely and become the blue sky for a moment.

Peace is clearly an internal matter, and so is stress. Both must begin with your own thoughts, and then extend outward. It is from an anxious, worried mind that a stressful perception of the world arises. Equally, it is from your peace of mind that a stress-free experience of life arises.