

Worksheet 4.3  
Stepping back from thoughts

Exercise: arm's length

Lock the fingers of each hand together. Now hold your hands in front of your eyes. How well can you focus on what you are trying to do?

Now try stretching your arms out with your fingers still locked together. How well can you focus on things now?

In the first example your hands are getting in the way of you doing anything because you can't see past them. However in the second example you are better able to see your surroundings and work around them. Your hands are still there, but they are not clouding your vision in the same way.

This is how thought labelling can help. Identifying "I am having the thought that..." can help us to step back from the thought and focus on other things rather than being blindly influenced by it.

See if you can try this the next time a difficult thought comes into your head. Make a note below of some of the difficult thoughts that come up for you starting them with "I am having the thought that..."

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Dealing with distressing thoughts

It can be useful to have a plan prepared for how you will deal with difficult thoughts when they come up:

- Step 1: Notice when difficult thoughts come up for you, for instance when you are feeling distressed check in with your thoughts.
- Step 2: Practice mindfulness or calming breathing.
- Step 3: Can you recognise any of the thinking styles mentioned? What would you say to a friend in this situation? It can be helpful here to label your thoughts, e.g. with "I am having the thought that..."
- Step 4: What do you need to do next? How can you best handle this situation?