



### ***The "Stop-Breathe-Reframe" Technique***

Once you gain experience recognizing and reframing *Automatic Negative Thoughts* using the Cognitive Restructuring Diary, you are ready for the final step in cognitive restructuring: recognizing and reframing ANTs at the very point that they filter through your mind using the Stop-Breathe-Reframe technique.

#### ***Stop***

When you encounter a stressful situation, pay immediate attention to the ANTs that you are experiencing, and then say "Stop" to yourself before the ANTs escalate. A decisive act as simple as saying "Stop" can help break the cycle of ANTs and the consequent undesirable emotional responses.

Because we're often more aware of the feelings that result from ANTs than the ANTs themselves, pay particular attention to your feelings and physical reactions when you encounter stress. These can be powerful cues that can help you recognize the cognitive miscues that distort your perceptions.

#### ***Breathe***

After saying "Stop," take a deep breath. This will aid relaxation, divert your attention away from Thinking Mind's cascade of thoughts, and, ultimately, help break the cycle of ANTs and negative emotions.

#### ***Reframe***

Reframe your negative thoughts using one of the three techniques described above:

- the ten key reframing questions
- the double-standard technique
- reflecting on past experience

I vividly remember my first professional presentation to a large group of people. I had just accepted a position in a stress management clinic shortly after college graduation and had been asked to give a talk to a business luncheon. My hands were clammy and my stomach was in a knot. On that occasion, these were the ANTs I recognized:

"I wish I didn't have to do this."

"I've never spoken in front of this many people before."

"What if I talk too fast and look rushed?"

"What if I forget parts of my talk?"

Fortunately, I had just learned the Stop-Breathe-Reframe technique as part of my training. I told myself to stop and take a few deep breaths. Next, I reframed my ANTs by using the ten reframing questions, with which I was able to gain a broader perspective on the situation:

- "I know this material and I'm well prepared."
- "Actually, a little stress is good because it will energize my performance."
- "I know I'll relax as soon as I begin my talk."

After using the Stop-Breathe-Reframe technique I felt much less anxious, and when it was time for me to make my presentation, I walked up to the podium, took a few deep breaths, and started in. I spoke slowly and confidently and, after a moment or two, found myself enjoying the experience.

Because ANTs are so automatic and habitual, the Stop-Breathe-Reframe technique takes some time to master. But, with practice, you can learn to use Stop-Breathe-Reframe anytime and anywhere to turn off the negative stress filter, to catch and reframe ANTs, and to develop a greater sense of control over your mental responses to stress.

Lauren, the actress, reported back to us that, while cognitive restructuring had not eliminated all her stress around performance time, it left her with an amount that was actually helpful. Like an athlete, she found that a manageable amount of anxiety enabled her to make the most of her talents. A little stress helped her to focus and be at the top of her game. She had returned to a more balanced response, reacting to stress only in proportion to the reality of the situation – the reality that, in its wisdom, the Ancestral Mind perceives. That's the reality that we, too, can focus on, once we learn to tame the Thinking Mind's distortions and distractions.