

Stop Right Now

Automatic responses can be unhelpful. Unless we are in a dangerous situation, fight or flight may not be the best way to react. Therefore, it can be valuable to have a set of questions nearby to rationally challenge what we are about to do.

When faced with an impulse to react automatically without considering the outcome (and if safe to do so), perform the following steps (modified from Forsyth & Eifert, 2016):

Step one: stop and take several slow, deep breaths. Focus on making the out-breath longer than the in-breath.

Step two: ask yourself the following questions, taking a few minutes to answer each one:

What am I feeling at this moment?

What am I telling myself? Are they good and helpful thoughts, or bad and unhelpful ones?

What are my impulses driving me to do?

If I act on these impulses, are they in line with my values (how I want my life to be)?

What will I look back on in the future and wish I had done?

In time and with practice, these questions can be internalized and become automatic. They can help you notice, experience, and learn rather than unthinkingly react.

References

- Forsyth, J. P., & Eifert, G. H. (2016). *The Mindfulness & Acceptance Workbook for Anxiety: A Guide to breaking free from Anxiety, Phobias & Worry Using Acceptance & Commitment Therapy*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.

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