**ACT Worksheet: “Defusing Unhelpful Thoughts”**

**Purpose:**

The goal of this worksheet is to introduce you to the **defusion** technique, a core element of **Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)**. Defusion is the process of distancing yourself from your thoughts and realizing that they are simply mental events—not absolute truths or commands. By learning to defuse from your thoughts, you can stop them from having power over your emotions and behavior. This allows you to break free from unhealthy patterns and act in ways that align with your values, rather than being ruled by fleeting thoughts or negative self-talk.

Our thoughts can be extremely persuasive. Sometimes, we believe them to be completely true, which can lead us to act in ways that don’t serve us. Defusion helps you see that your thoughts are just words or images in your mind, not necessarily facts. Through this process, you will learn how to **separate** yourself from your thoughts, create distance from them, and view them more objectively. This shift in perspective allows you to choose how to respond to them instead of reacting impulsively.

This worksheet will guide you through exercises to recognize when you are fused (i.e., when you’re fully immersed in a thought and feeling controlled by it) and help you practice defusion strategies that will free you to make decisions that are more in line with your deeper values. The more you practice defusion, the more freedom you’ll have to live the life you truly want, instead of getting stuck in the cycle of unhelpful thoughts and reactions.

**Step 1: Recognizing When You Are Fused with Your Thoughts**

Before we begin the exercises, it’s important to recognize when you’re fused with a thought. You’re fused when you believe that thought without question or feel completely controlled by it. Fusing often leads to emotional distress and can keep you stuck in negative patterns.

Reflect on the following questions and answer them as honestly as you can:

1. **Do you ever feel like your thoughts are “facts” or “truth”?**
2. **When you have a negative thought, do you often feel compelled to act on it, even if it doesn’t make sense?**
3. **Think about a recent time when you experienced a negative or distressing thought. What did you feel when you had that thought? Did you automatically believe it?**
4. **What was the impact of that thought on your actions?**

**Step 2: Defusing from a Thought**

Now that you have some insight into when you tend to fuse with your thoughts, let's practice defusing. Here are some strategies to help you separate from your thoughts and see them for what they are.

**Technique 1: “I’m Having the Thought That…”**

One of the easiest ways to defuse from a thought is by naming it as just that—a thought. This helps you create space between yourself and the thought.

**Instructions:** Think of a distressing thought you are currently experiencing. Now, change the phrasing of that thought by adding: “I’m having the thought that…” For example, instead of saying, “I’m a failure,” say, “I’m having the thought that I’m a failure.”

1. **Write down a negative thought you are currently struggling with:**
2. **Now, reframe it using the “I’m having the thought that…” format:**
3. **Notice how it feels to distance yourself from the thought. How does it change your emotional reaction?**

**Technique 2: Singing the Thought**

Another fun and effective way to defuse from a thought is by singing it in a silly voice. This may sound strange, but it helps break the power that the thought has over you.

**Instructions:** Take the thought you’ve written above and sing it out loud in a silly or cartoonish voice. Try to make it as ridiculous as possible! This lighthearted approach allows you to take the thought less seriously and recognize it as just a passing mental event.

1. **Write down how you can sing your thought in a silly voice:**
2. **How did it feel to sing the thought? Did it seem less threatening?**

**Technique 3: The “Leaves on a Stream” Exercise**

This technique is a mindfulness practice used to defuse from thoughts by visualizing them as leaves floating down a stream. The idea is to see the thought as something separate from you that can simply float by, without it affecting you or your actions.

**Instructions:** Close your eyes and imagine that you are sitting next to a stream. Picture your thoughts as leaves floating on the surface of the water, gently drifting by. Each thought is just a leaf—something that comes and goes.

1. **Now, think of a negative or distressing thought. Imagine it as a leaf on the stream.**
2. **Visualize the leaf floating away. How does it feel to let the thought pass without holding on to it?**

**Step 3: Committing to Action Based on Your Values**

Now that you have practiced defusing from a thought, it’s time to refocus on what truly matters to you. You don’t have to let your thoughts dictate your actions. With defusion, you can recognize your thoughts without letting them control your behavior.

**Instructions:** Think about one value that is important to you (e.g., family, health, kindness, creativity). Choose an action you can take today, no matter how small, that reflects that value. It’s important to act according to what you believe in, not based on what your thoughts tell you.

1. **What is one value that matters to you?**
2. **What is one small action you can take today that reflects that value?**

**Reflection:**

As you continue to practice defusion, remember that thoughts are not the enemy. They are simply mental events that come and go. By distancing yourself from them, you give yourself the freedom to choose how you respond. The more you practice, the easier it will become to let thoughts pass without them influencing your actions. Use these techniques to make more conscious choices and live according to your values, no matter what thoughts arise.

1. **How do you feel after completing this worksheet? Did it change how you view your thoughts?**
2. **What is one thing you will do to keep practicing defusion in your daily life?**