

# SPRING CLEANING FOR THE MIND

As the spring season begins, many of us focus a lot of our physical energy on cleaning out our living spaces, our cars, our gardens, outdoor areas, and even our computer's hard drive. It is natural to feel a sense of relief, and even accomplishment, when we rid ourselves of belongings that are no longer of use to us.

Spring calls for growth and renewal. As the trees and flowers bloom and the temperature changes, what if we shifted some of our energy and focus to spring cleaning our mind? Most of us do not think about our mind being a place that also needs consistent "upkeep".

According to the late Dr. Wayne Dyer, most of us experience an average of 60,000 thoughts per day. That's a tremendous amount of thinking going on in our mind! Many therapists, counselors, and psychologists engage patients in a useful and highly effective modality called Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). CBT was developed by psychiatrist Aaron T. Beck in the 1960s. This modality teaches people how thoughts create feelings and emotions which then impact our behavior and/or the way our body reacts. Extensive research has demonstrated how impactful this modality can be on improving symptoms of depression and anxiety.

CBT is a powerful tool because it teaches us to pay close attention not just to our thoughts but also to the content of our thoughts. Paying close attention helps to identify common themes within our mind or repetitive thoughts. In helping to

identify these themes within our mind, people are able to label and identify what counselors refer to as "cognitive distortions" or "irrational thinking styles".

Irrational thinking styles are powerful indicators of the landscape of our brain. Often, as people begin to investigate their innermost thoughts, they are able to recognize unhealthy patterns in their thinking. Some common forms of unhealthy thinking styles are all-or-nothing thinking, magnification, labeling, disqualifying the positive, mind reading, and catastrophizing. **All-or-nothing thinking** styles lead people to view commonalities within their life or situation as only having two solutions: bad or good or right and wrong. **Labeling** can lead to negative beliefs about ourselves: "I am not good enough" and "I am worthless." **Disqualifying the positive** leads to thoughts that discount all the positive qualities of ourselves, our lives, and events. **Mind reading** leads people to believe that they know for a fact what others are thinking. Lastly, **catastrophizing** thoughts lead people to imagine the worst possible outcome and will often experience "what ifs". Unhealthy thoughts can often become a habit, and they repeat themselves in our mind over and over again, leading to feelings of worry, anxiety, and sadness.

Here are some tips to get started on spring cleaning your mind:

1. Make a conscious effort to pay attention to your thoughts, your ideas, and your beliefs. Most people find that they think

about the same negative thoughts every day! Once you have a mental or physical list of these thoughts, ask yourself: What do I worry about most? Where did these negative thoughts come from? Did someone tell me this? Do I truly believe this to be true? How does this thought make me feel? Is this a fact or an opinion? A journal can be very helpful.

2. Look outside your busy head space and try viewing your thoughts as a story. What is my story? Is it helping me solve problems? Is my story creating feelings of stress?

3. Get outside and do things that you enjoy! Maybe even do something that you've always been scared to do. Engaging in something that makes us uncomfortable can help to challenge negative thoughts and transform them from "I can't do this" to "I tried it, and I am okay."

4. Let go of worries and improve your ability to accept. If you experience the same repetitive thought that you just can't seem to let go, ask yourself: Is there something I need to do to be able to let this thought or idea go? Is there something about

my life in this moment that is keeping me from letting this go? Do I need to reach out to someone or change a relationship that is impacting me?

5. Put effort into changing negative thinking styles and negative stories. We cannot get rid of our thoughts, but we can change the atmosphere of our head space. We can think in healthy, rational ways that help clear our mind of stressful, unwanted thoughts, ideas, and beliefs.

6. Be patient! Cleaning out unhealthy thoughts takes time and lots of practice.

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