

## The Theoretical Basis for STOP!

- One: Everyone is hurt.
- Two: Anger, anxiety, depression or other negative emotions cover hurt!
- Three: The hurt is not caused by other people or events.
- Four: People and events trigger the painful, unconscious, irrational, and mistaken beliefs we hold that deny our worth and value as human beings. Other people and events remind us of our worthlessness but they couldn't make us feel it if it wasn't already internalized. Contemporary American culture feeds our doubts about our worth by its emphasis on success, performance, appearance, money, fame and consumerism.
- Five: These mistaken beliefs are the result of the experience of childhood. Children, who are dependent, innocent and curious are excellent observers. They are also egocentric and unsophisticated. They incorrectly interpret negative experiences to mean that something is defective, inferior, or flawed in them. They blame themselves because it is not possible to blame the adults on whom they depend. They come to believe that they have to do or be something other than who they are to be valuable, acceptable, and lovable.
- Six: To doubt our worth is so painful we bury our doubts deeply and use anger to keep it hidden from ourselves and everyone else.
- Seven: We can use our anger (or any negative emotion) as a signal to go inside and to feel the hurt we deny. If we are willing to feel it, we can then use the truth of our innate worth to heal it and us.

## STOPI : A TECHNIQUE FOR EMOTIONAL REGULATION

STOPI is a simple technique with deep and profound effects. With repeated and consistent practice STOPI actually changes the way we think and feel. STOPI heals past hurts and prevents hurt in the present. By allowing us to experience the pain of the hurt underlying our negative emotions briefly and then counteracting it with the self-soothing truth of innate worth, STOPI gives us power over our internal world and emotions. This allows us to deal more effectively with any situation that presents itself. It gives us the ability to operate in our own best interest instead of simply reacting out of old beliefs, biases, and patterns.

STOPI has four steps. The first three are often used in teaching children how to cross a street: STOPI, LOOK, LISTEN. The fourth step is CHOOSE. Using a simple, familiar pattern helps make it easy to learn the technique and memorize it so it will be instantly available when needed. Also using the logo of the ever present stop sign reinforces the use of the technique as a part of daily life. The stop sign is a frequent reminder of what to do when experiencing painful emotion (road rage, anyone?).

Here is how to do the STOPI technique. When you feel any negative or painful emotion, no matter how small or minor it may seem, use this as an opportunity to practice the technique and build up your emotional regulation muscles.

### Practice, Practice, Practice!

Don't wait for a major emotional upset to use this skill. It will probably not work then. You have to build up this skill by using it every time you feel any negative emotion (angry, sad, hurt, scared - even in their mildest forms). You can practice by recalling things that have upset you in past as well as things that are happening now.

## DOING STOP!

- Step One: See the word STOP! flash two or three times in your mind in color; and say it to yourself.
- Step Two: LOOK! inside yourself. What basic mistake or lie are you into that is causing you pain? Identify the feeling and name it. Say "I feel..." Feel it for a couple of seconds. Feel the pain. Then ask yourself...  
? → Does this event mean that I am ....? (The answer has to be a sincere NO! to proceed).
- Step Three: LISTEN! to the truth of your innate worth. The mistaken belief is a lie. What is the truth about you? (It is the opposite of the lie.)  
 Say "I am..." Feel your innate worth. (it feels good, like comfort or relief.)
- Step Four: CHOOSE! to behave in your own best interest. Now that you have healed the hurt and transformed the anger (depression or anxiety), What do you want to do about the incident? What options do you have now?

Practice, Practice, Practice! (Best to do when emotional <sup>at the time</sup>)

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Technique will not work if you choose too low level of a feeling for circumstances, but will work if you choose too high a level

## THE STEPS OF STOP! EXPLAINED

- Step One: In the first step of STOP! you are asked to visualize the word STOP! flash two or three times in your mind in color; and say it to yourself. This step helps you switch from the limbic part of your brain (the emotional center) to the neocortex (thinking part of your brain). If you are visual picturing the word STOP! will be automatic. For people who are not visual, saying the word aloud to themselves will work as well. This is a technique called "thought stopping". We want to be able to switch to the adult, rational brain as quickly as possible when we are upset. That is the part of the brain that thinks, reasons and chooses and the one that will help us make the best decisions in dealing with the problem occurring.
- Step Two: LOOK! inside yourself. In this step you turn your attention away from the external world to understand what is going on inside of you. This does not mean that you won't have to deal with the outside world but you will do so out of self-awareness and power instead of reactivity if you deal with yourself and your feelings **first**. If you are upset, even mildly, a mistaken belief has been triggered. In this step you identify what basic mistake or lie you are into that is causing you pain. On an unconscious, irrational level what do you think this incident means about your worth as a human? Choose a word that seems to fit your feeling. Do you feel unimportant, devalued, rejected, defective, worthless, powerless, unlovable or less than human? Identify the feeling and name it. Say "I feel..." Feel it for a couple of seconds. It hurts. You have to feel the pain in order to heal it.

Then you ask yourself the important question; **Is it true that this incident means you are without innate worth, in whatever way you chose to describe it?** No! It can never mean that. You need to **feel** that the "no" is the truth. It has to be an emotional response not only an intellectual one. If you want to say "yes, it does mean that I am...." choose another, even more hurtful word to describe the mistaken belief and do the step again until you can say honestly "No, it doesn't mean that".

- **Step Three:** In this step you will counteract the mistaken belief by connecting with the truth of your innate worth. **LISTEN** to the truth of your innate worth. Affirm your value as a human being. You are important, valuable, acceptable, adequate, worthwhile, powerful, lovable and fully human, even if you made a mistake or someone is upset with you or you are upset with yourself. Again it is important that you **Feel your innate worth**. This has to be an emotional experience and not only an intellectual one. Choose a word that is the opposite of what you identified as the mistaken belief. Say "I am...". When you allow yourself to feel your innate worth you will experience a sense of relief and comfort. It may be mild or strong depending on how bad you feel and how disconnected you are from your innate worth.

- Step Four: In this final and important step you **CHOOSE!** to behave in your own best interest. Regulating your painful emotion and affirming your innate worth will allow you to be aware of a number of options which you could not see while you were acting out of the limbic part of your brain. You may decide that there really isn't a problem at all after you know it is not about your worth. And if you do have to take an action with or toward another to solve the problem, you will be doing it from your best self and the rational, creative and adult part of your brain. This will almost guarantee that you will get a more positive outcome than if you simply reacted out of emotion with a lack of self-awareness and self-control. If you are still upset, do STOP! again.

WORDS THAT DESCRIBE  
INNATE WORTH

(the truth about us)

important  
valuable  
acceptable  
worthy  
worthwhile  
good enough  
equal  
adequate  
lovable  
respectable  
unique  
precious  
special  
fully human  
meaningful

WORDS THAT DESCRIBE  
MISTAKEN BELIEFS OR

BASIC MISTAKES

(the lies about us)

unimportant  
valueless  
unacceptable  
unworthy  
worthless  
not good enough  
inferior  
inadequate  
unlovable  
shameful  
defective  
flawed  
nothing special  
less than human  
meaningless

## <internal - look inside>

### Self Mastery Response

1. Notice and identify the feeling.  
"I feel irritated."
2. Look for the cause of the feeling.  
"I am hurt"
3. Look inside. Explore emotional world.  
Practice emotional regulation  
Do STOP!
4. Irritation dissipates.
5. Begin problem solving.  
What do I want to do about it?
6. Friend arrives, full of apologies.
7. I accept her apology and ask that she call me on my cell phone if she is late.
8. We have a nice lunch and part friends.

## <External>

### Assertive Response

1. Notice and identify the feeling.  
"I feel irritated."
2. Look for the cause of problem.  
"She is late again."
3. Start preparing my case to justify my anger. "Being late is so disrespectful. She is rude."
4. Anger grows.
5. Begin problem solving.  
What do I want to do about it?
6. Friend arrive, full of apologies.
7. I tell her she has upset me & I will not wait for her again.
8. We have a strained lunch and part unsure of the friendship.



Negative emotions anxiety, sad, anger, and fear.

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Stop

Look

Question?

Listen

Choose

