Attention practice record

Choose a short, safe everyday task. Thoughts are allowed to come along.

Editable PDF: replace or delete the fictional examples. Blank PDF: print and write. Guidance follows.

What activity will I practise with?

What will I notice in the task or surroundings?

What might pull my attention away?

How will I return attention without arguing with the thought?

What happened during the practice?

What did I learn, and what will I practise next?

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Attention practice record - guide

Use alongside the worksheet on page 1. Adapt it to your needs and any therapy plan.

What this helps with

Worry can pull attention away from what we are doing. Attention practice means noticing this and gently choosing where to place your attention next. The aim is flexibility and participation, not an empty mind or immediate relief from anxiety.

How to use it

1. Pick a safe, ordinary task you want to take part in. Start briefly; adapt the activity to your senses, energy and concentration.

2. Choose a few details of the task to notice, without needing to scan for every detail.

3. When the mind wanders, acknowledge it and return to the activity. You do not need to push the thought away or repeat a phrase perfectly.

4. Record participation and learning afterwards. Practise occasionally rather than whenever you need certainty that you are calm.

A fictional example

Before a meeting, Sam notices repeated predictions about making a mistake. While making tea, he attends to the cup, the kettle sound and the sequence of the task. His mind wanders and he returns. The predictions are still there when he finishes; he has practised choosing an activity alongside worry rather than waiting until he feels ready.

Keep in mind

Do not practise during driving, crossing roads or any task needing undivided safety attention. This is not a way to ignore an urgent problem or medical symptoms. Stop or change the exercise if it increases distress or disconnection, and discuss this with your therapist if needed.

Review your learning

Could I return to what I was doing, even with some worry present?

Sources informing the approach

NICE (2011, updated 2020). Generalised anxiety disorder and panic disorder in adults: management. CG113.

Centre for Clinical Interventions. Worry and rumination: overview of attention practice within CBT self-help.

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