



Attention Training

-Basic Technique-



Attention focus training is a technique used in CBT to help individuals improve their ability to focus on the present moment and increase their overall awareness. This exercise is particularly helpful for individuals who struggle with getting stuck in worries and negative thoughts but can be helpful for anyone struggling to focus on the present moment in their day to day lives.

Rationale

The rationale behind attention focus training is to help individuals learn how to shift their attention away from negative thoughts and feelings and focus on the present moment. We have been hard wired biologically to look for threats, but sadly in our modern day and age heightened anxiety can sometimes lead us to focus on perceived threats and not actual threats. Focus on perceived threats can make us worry about the future and what bad things might or could happen. It can be hard to get unstuck from these kinds of thoughts. When we are able to focus our attention away from the thoughts and on the task we are doing, we are then better able to check out all the information we have available in a logical way which then makes it easier to regulate our emotions and reduce stress and anxiety.

Practical Example

Let's apply this reasoning to an example. When we feel anxious, it happens very often that our attention doesn't stay with the actual task we are doing. We are focused on our own symptoms of anxiety. This can be our sweaty hands, our increased heart rate and so on. We are focusing on our self and not on the task. It can also be that we are scanning the environment. What could go wrong? Who is coming towards me? Is that person looking at me funny? We are focused on everything around us, but not the actual task. These types of focus can make it very likely that we will not do the task to our full capabilities and can cause them to go wrong or make us only focus on the negative aspects of what we are able to see, hear, etc. All of these can lead us to feel that we are not very skilled or further reinforce our anxiety that it always will go wrong. So how can we move our attention to the task at hand? Let's practice!



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Instructions

1. Choose a simple task to complete. This can be anything from washing dishes, doing some cleaning or preparing a meal.
2. As you begin the task, take a few deep breaths and ground yourself in the present moment.
3. Focus your attention on the task at hand. Notice the sensations of your hands or the movement of your body.
4. Try to engage all of your senses in the task. Notice the smell of the soap or the sound of the oven fan when you put your meal in.
5. If you notice your mind wandering or getting distracted, gently bring your attention back to the task. Don't judge yourself or get frustrated if you find this difficult at first. Remember that this is a skill that takes practice.
6. Continue to complete the task you are engaged in whilst engaging with your senses. When you are finished, take a few more deep breaths to end the task.

Tips

1. Start with small tasks: If you're new to attention focus training, start with a small and simple task to begin with, such as washing a few dishes or folding a few pieces of clothing.
2. Eliminate distractions: Try to complete the task in a quiet environment without any distractions, such as turning off your phone or finding a quiet room to work in.
3. Use all of your senses: Engage all of your senses in the task by noticing the colors, smells, textures, and sounds associated with it.
4. Practice regularly: Make it a habit to practice attention focus training regularly, even if it's just for a few minutes each day. The more you practice, the easier it will become.
5. Be patient and kind to yourself: Remember that this is a skill that takes practice and patience. Don't get discouraged if you find it difficult at first. Be kind to yourself and continue to practice.



Full Video Guidance available through clicking or scanning the QR code



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The following fillable worksheet can be helpful to practice your attention focus training. It is helpful to keep track of how well the focusing is going and what might make it easier or harder to do so. The first column contains the task. In the second one you can track the duration you were able to focus. The third column is to score your focus level out of 10 and finally the fourth column is to keep track of anything you noticed during (How easy or hard was it to focus? Did you get distracted often?,...)

What was the focused task?	How long?	How was your focus?	What did you notice?