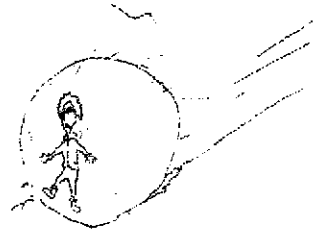


## LESSON 8

# ELIMINATING THOUGHT CIRCLES



### OBJECTIVES: FOR STUDENTS TO:

1. Become aware of Thought Circles and how they develop.
2. Develop strategies for managing Thought Circles effectively.

### PREPARATION:

1. Prepare an appropriate Settle piece.
2. Read "Eliminating Thought Circles" (p. 53-57).
3. Prepare Handout #8 for each student.
4. Prepare a copy of the Anger Thought Circle dialogue (8.4) for yourself and two students.

**TIME:** 50 minutes

### CLASS ACTIVITIES:

#### 1. SETTLE (5)

#### 2. INTRODUCTION (7)

- A. "Let's take an imaginary student named Trent who has finished soccer practice and is waiting at the stadium for his parents to pick him up and give him a ride home. The parents were to arrive at 5:00 and it is now 5:10. What do you imagine is going through Trent's mind?"

Write 2-3 examples on the board as the students share them and then ask: "Let's look at one of these examples. If this was Trent's first thought, what would be his next thought?"

After one student offers Trent's next thought, ask: "And his next thought?"

Repeat this until 5-6 thoughts have been strung together.

"Look at the example on your handout of what might be going on in Trent's head."



B. "What Trent is experiencing in his mind is what we are going to call Thought Circles. **Thought Circles are mental habits that are likely to occur when people are Below the Line.** When someone is experiencing Thought Circles, one thought leads to another and another and another like a snowball getting larger and larger as it rolls down hill. Each individual thought may or may not be logically connected to the previous thought. Thought Circles result in rapid descent far Below the Line."

C. Share the objectives for today's class.

### 3. THE WORRY THOUGHT CIRCLE (5)

A. "Thought Circles come in two varieties: Worry Thought Circles and Anger Thought Circles. The example of Trent has bits of both but let's use it to do an anatomy of worry. Trent's Thought Circle formed because he allowed his thoughts to: jump to conclusions, imagine the worst possible outcome, and be highly judgmental

B. "Thought Circles build up power to control us as they get bigger and bigger. They send us very rapidly deeper and deeper Below the Line. So the faster we realize we are having a Thought Circle the easier it is to get out. As we get deeper and deeper BTL, it is more difficult to stop the Circle from expanding even further."

C. "How could Trent have handled his Thought Circle better?"



D. After students give their suggestions, refer to the example on the handout. Point out that **two ways to manage Thought Circles are to be aware when they are beginning and to stick with the facts.**

### 4. LET THE PROBLEM BE THE PROBLEM (3)



A. "Because Top 20s are aware when they are having a Thought Circle, they don't allow their Thought Circle to add to the problem. In other words, **they don't let their thinking make the original problem worse than it already is.** Instead, they **let the problem be the problem** by understanding the original problem and dealing with that. Otherwise, your ever-widening Thought Circle will send you spiraling BTL."

B. "With that in mind, what was Trent's problem?" (His parents were late.)

"His parents being late was the only problem he had. So he should just let that problem be the problem and not think his way into other problems."

### 5. THE ANGRY THOUGHT CIRCLE (7)

A. "Remember, it doesn't take long for a Thought Circle to go from its first thought to its tenth thought. This happens in just a few seconds. It doesn't take long to work yourself into a frenzy and create a real mess for yourself and others. Let's see how this can happen with an Anger Thought Circle."

B. Role play with two students using the 'Script for an Anger Thought Circle'. The students should have the script prior to class so they can prepare to deliver their lines with appropriate emotion.



C. "What you've just seen is the anatomy of anger. Brainstorm in your Pods all the things Susan lost because of her anger Thought Circle."

Have Voices report. What Susan lost includes:

- \* An opportunity to have a great time shopping with her mom.
- \* An opportunity to enjoy watching her movie.
- \* A desire on her mother's part to do something special for Susan in the future.
- \* An opportunity to take responsibility for herself and not blame her mother.

D. "All of this and more is lost not because someone was trying to make Susan's life miserable but because her anger Thought Circle made her life a mess. So if you want to experience something different and act in your Best Interest, you first need to change what you are thinking and stop Thought Circles in their tracks. You have the power to do this."

## 6. STOP THOUGHT CIRCLES IN THEIR TRACKS (5)

A. "One simple way to stop Thought Circles is to use the 'Not Now' technique. Whenever you become aware of a Thought Circle beginning, say, 'Stop. This is a Thought Circle. Not now.'"

B. "Sometimes the concern that begins the Thought Circle needs to be seriously considered. Maybe someone you care about is ill or maybe you have to make an important but difficult decision. You can't just neglect some issues or concerns. But if you can't give the problem or situation the attention it requires at the time, put the issue in your mental Parking Lot until later. Make an appointment with yourself to deal with it after school and when you are Above the Line. Stay in the present."



C. "Using 'Not Now' or putting concerns in your mental Parking Lot are ways of taking control of your life rather than being controlled. They are ways of creating a Good Ride for yourself by not contaminating your experience and by dealing with concerns when you are best able to do so."

## 7. PRACTICE NAME, CLAIM AND TAME (5)

"Top 20s have developed the ability to be aware of what they are thinking and to control what they are thinking. Those are the keys to managing Thought Circles. Look at the 'Practice Name, Claim and Tame' section of your handout." (Go over this process with your students.)

## 8. PERSONAL APPLICATION (7)

Do the 'Personal Application' section on the handout with your students. Invite students to share examples. Share yours as well.

## 9. CONCLUSION (5)

A. "What are your **take-aways** from today's class?"

B. Consider using **Time for Action** (p. 57).

## SCRIPT FOR AN ANGER THOUGHT CIRCLE

**Narrator:** Imagine that Susan is watching TV downstairs when she hears her mother call from upstairs.

**Mother:** "Susan, can I see you for a second?"

**Narrator:** Susan thinks,

**Susan:** "Now what? I'll bet she wants me to clean my room again. I hate when she does this when I'm watching TV."

**Narrator:** So Susan, wrapped in a Thought Circle and well Below the Line, runs upstairs and yells in a nasty voice.

**Susan:** "WHAT?"

**Narrator:** Her mother, who was about to ask Susan if she'd like to go shopping with her at the Mall, sinks Below the Line and barks back,

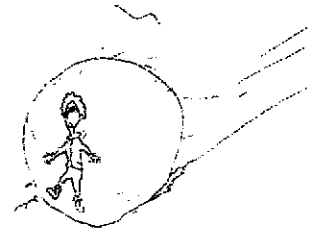
**Mother:** "What? What's wrong with you?"

**Susan:** "You always bug me just when I'm getting into a good movie."

**Mother:** "Well, you asked me this morning to take you to the Mall so I was just calling to tell you we could go in a few minutes. But forget it. I won't disturb you now. No way am I going to spend five minutes with you when you act like this...not today and not ever."

**Narrator:** Susan storms back downstairs and adds thoughts of running away from home to her original Thought Circle.

# ELIMINATING THOUGHT CIRCLES



**THOUGHT CIRCLES:** mental habits that are likely to occur when people are Below the Line.

When someone is experiencing Thought Circles, one thought leads to another and another and another like a snowball getting larger and larger as it rolls down hill. Thought Circles result in rapid descent far Below the Line. Because Thought Circles build up power to control us as they expand, the sooner we realize we are having a Thought Circle the easier it is to get out.



## THE WORRY THOUGHT CIRCLE:

Worry Thought Circles form when we:

- \* Jump to conclusions
- \* Imagine the worst possible outcome
- \* Are highly judgmental

## STOPPING THOUGHT CIRCLES IN THEIR TRACKS:

1. **Be aware** when they are beginning to form.
2. **Say 'Not Now':** As soon as you become aware of a Thought Circle forming, say, "Stop. This is a Thought Circle. Not now."
3. **Let the Problem Be the Problem:** Stick with the facts. Don't allow your Thought Circle to add to the problem.

4. **Use the Parking Lot:** If you can't give the problem or situation the attention it requires at the time, put the issue in your mental Parking Lot until later.

**Stay in the present.**

Using 'Not Now' or putting concerns in your mental Parking Lot are ways of taking control of your life rather than being controlled.



## PRACTICE NAME, CLAIM AND TAME:

**NAME:** Become aware when you are experiencing a Thought Circle and identify it as such: "I'm having a thought circle."

**CLAIM:** Take responsibility for your thoughts and remember that you have the power to change them instantly.

**TAME:** Sort out fact (that which you know for sure) from fiction (that which may not be real). Stay focused on the facts and say "Not now" to the fiction.

## PERSONAL APPLICATION:

1. When, where, why or in which situations are you most likely to have Thought Circles?
2. Recall a Thought Circle that you have experienced. As you begin to replay that Thought Circle in your mind, practice the strategy of Name, Claim and Tame.