



WorkLifePsych



First steps in  
Psychological **Flexibility**

Part three:  
Cognitive Defusion

# First Steps in Psychological Flexibility

## Part three: Cognitive Defusion

### Episode summary

In this third episode of the series, Richard and Ross explore the next skill in the ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy/Theory) model: cognitive defusion. They explain what it actually is, look at its benefits, how they personally bring it to life, and share some simple ways you can build it into your routines.

### What is Defusion?

When we practice Defusion, we're learning to see our thoughts for what they are, rather than what they say they are. They can often present themselves as facts, truths, or demands. By taking a step back and looking *at* thoughts, rather than *through* them, we can see that they're simple mental 'stuff' that we don't necessarily need to deal with or respond to.

### What's in it for me?

Defusion is an incredibly powerful skill, something we emphasise in this episode. It frees us up from the struggle with thoughts and emotions and liberates us in meaningful ways. Rather than 'dealing with' thoughts, we simply let them pass and instead, focus on our present moment and whatever or whoever is in it.

When we're not wrestling with thoughts (whatever form they take), we're able to be more intentional about our choices and actions. We're not limited by the fearful or anxiety-inducing tone many thoughts have, and we can see them as our mind just trying to help us out. Albeit bluntly and sometimes too loudly!

Once you've developed the skill of defusion, you can let thoughts be thoughts, rather than instructions or ultimatums. You can let self-criticism, predictions or self-limiting beliefs simply float on by, while you get on with the important stuff in life.

Quite the benefit, right?

## So what do I need to do?

We describe a few simple ways to build this skill in this episode, including:

- Writing your thoughts down
- Labelling your thoughts
- Visualising thoughts as moving objects
- Expressing thoughts as stuff your mind is giving you

There's no one, perfect way of doing this. It's best to try a few of the methods and stick with one that resonates with you. You can treat it lightly and have some fun too! Remember Richard's example of 'lying cat', or Ross's passengers on the bus?

The main thing is to include some element of movement or dynamism, and not trying to evaluate or control the thoughts. When we practice defusion, the goal is not to change, remove or somehow suppress the thoughts. It's to simply see them as thoughts and let them move along.

## Other resources mentioned in this episode

### Videos

The sushi metaphor: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KrrNMzvS7Tg>

### Other resources

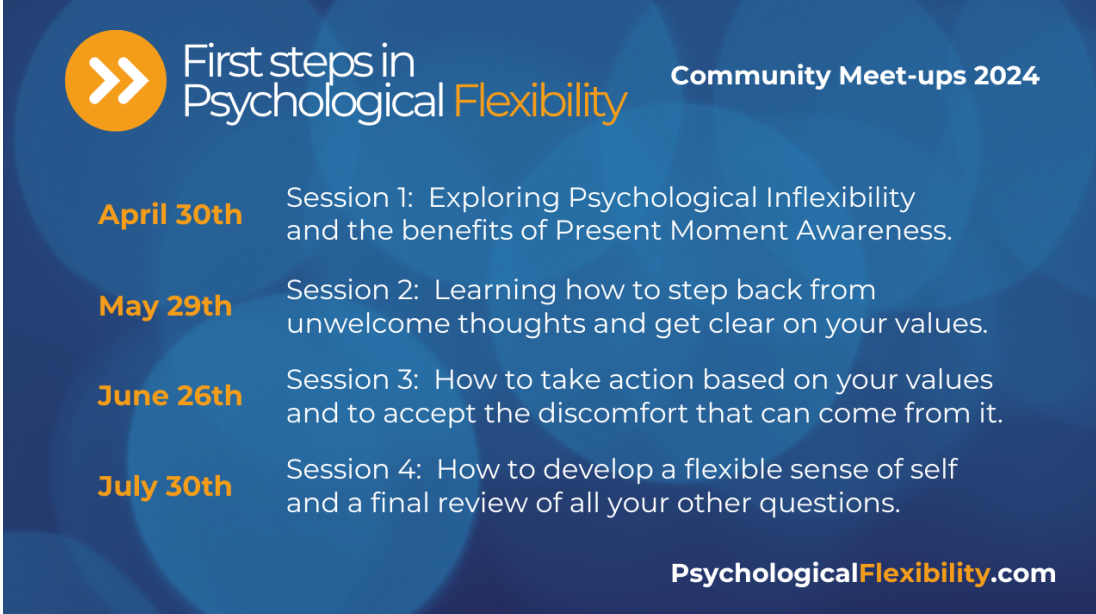
Saga graphic novel: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saga\\_\(comics\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saga_(comics))

Anxious thoughts and feelings podcast episode: <https://www.worklifepsych.com/podcast/ep-061-anxious-thoughts-and-feelings/>

## Join us online to find out more

From April onwards, we'll be hosting live online Q&A sessions to answer all your questions about psychological flexibility and your learning journey. The sessions are completely free to join, you just need to be a member of the WorkLifePsych Community to attend. Don't worry - that's free too! You can sign up today at [WorkLifePsych.club](https://worklifepsych.club).

The dates of these sessions are outlined below and you can find all the details of how to join via the 'Events' menu once you're logged in to [worklifepsych.club](https://worklifepsych.club).



**First steps in Psychological Flexibility** **Community Meet-ups 2024**

**April 30th** Session 1: Exploring Psychological Inflexibility and the benefits of Present Moment Awareness.

**May 29th** Session 2: Learning how to step back from unwelcome thoughts and get clear on your values.

**June 26th** Session 3: How to take action based on your values and to accept the discomfort that can come from it.

**July 30th** Session 4: How to develop a flexible sense of self and a final review of all your other questions.

**PsychologicalFlexibility.com**

## Get in touch with your questions

If you can't join us for the live Q&A session feel free to get in touch with questions and comments about the series. We'll cover them off in the Q&A and publish the recording afterwards so you can stay involved - no matter what timezone you're in!

Email your thoughts to [podcast@worklifepsych.com](mailto:podcast@worklifepsych.com)

## Find out more about your hosts

### Who is Dr. Richard MacKinnon?

Richard is a Chartered Occupational Psychologist and Chartered Coaching Psychologist with over twenty years of experience as a practitioner psychologist. Originally from Dublin, Richard has made London his home.

He founded WorkLifePsych in 2014 to bring evidence-based people development solutions to his clients. He provides coaching, training and development programmes to support clients' wellbeing, productivity and interpersonal effectiveness at work. Find out more about him on [his website](#). He publishes 'My Pocket Psych' every two weeks.

### Who is Ross McIntosh?

After a career of over 20 years in central government in senior HR roles Ross left the Civil Service and returned to study, pursuing an MSc in Organisational Psychology at City, University of London. On the course he discovered a branch of behavioural science that resonated with him in such a profound way that he decided to find ways to share the skills with people in organisations in every sector, from the NHS and Teachers to Hedge Fund Managers, Global Tech and Professional Ballet Dancers.

He's now a researcher and honorary visiting lecturer in organisational psychology at City, as well as the presenter of the '[People Soup](#)' podcast.