



Slow down and "step back" mentally and emotionally from the situation. When you are in a stressful situation or even a time when tensions are building, it is easy for things to start moving too fast. This is when the sympathetic nervous system kicks in and "your next thought will not be an intelligent one". This is also a time when having a healthy self-awareness is important. Become familiar with what is happening in your body, mind and emotions during times of stress so you can effectively interrupt disruptive thinking and reactions.

SLOW DOWN...STEP BACK

Think and take time to assess what is happening. Once you have interrupted the anxious, reactive thoughts and behavior by getting your body and mind back to a place of quiet by breathing or moving away from the situation if possible...take time to think. What is really going on in the present moment. Not what you feel is going on...just the facts. Taking a good assessment of who is a part of the situation, what is happening, and your part in it...or maybe you find it is not your situation or problem to deal with. This is a time to practice situational awareness.

THINK...TAKE TIME

Observe and orient yourself to "here and now". Resist "what if" thinking. This would be the time to review "how" and "what" caused the anxiety or conflict...is this a pattern in which you find yourself when you are in similar situations? Hopefully, you are getting back to a place of calm. Observe and recognize what you are feeling and how your thinking is more steady. Make a mental note of what is going on, not just around you but also inside of you so you can return to this mental, emotional, and behavioral place more quickly next time.

OBSERVE...ORIENT

Plan and prepare. With all of the information you have gathered in the thinking and observation phases, this is when you make a plan to handle the current situation and prepare ways to avoid or interrupt the crisis or anxiety when or if it happens again. Planning and preparing for how you want to address these kinds of situations in the future is important. If you have a habit of "freaking out" when something out of your control happens or you feel pressure, think about how you would like to handle things. Picture yourself managing stress and anxiety in a healthy way.

PLAN...PREPARE

STOP is a strategy for returning to a state of equilibrium after a time of stress or anxiety. So often we feel that "this is just the way we are" or "this is just what happens when I get stressed out". That is not true. It is our responsibility to take charge of challenging and stress producing situations. Unhealthy mental and emotional habits can create chronic illness, difficulty in relationships and an overall sense of unhappiness. An increased confidence in one's ability to listen to one's emotions without letting them take over comes with practice and promotes mental health and well-being.