Thought Stopping

Thought stopping is a technique that you can use to interrupt or stop unhelpful recurring thoughts. The underlying idea is that you will consciously and intentionally tell yourself to "Stop!" when you are experiencing overwhelming or unhelpful thoughts. Next you will want to turn your attention to something else or replace the negative thought with a more balanced or realistic thought.

An example of an unhelpful thought and a more balanced thought could be:

Unhelpful: "I am incompetent"
More balanced: "I may not always get things right the first time, but I try until I get them done well."

It can be helpful to have a good idea of what types of unhelpful thoughts are happening for you. To get a good idea you will want to pay attention to the thoughts that you are having and maybe even track them with a thought record. Next you will want to identify more realistic or helpful thoughts that you can substitute once you have stopped the negative thoughts.

When you notice that you are experiencing unhelpful thoughts, feel overwhelmed by your thoughts, or are having trouble focusing on other tasks because of the negative thoughts you will want to try to stop them. People do this differently, so you may want to try a few ways to see what works best for you.

Some people set a timer for 1 minute and pay attention to the thoughts and when the timer goes off they say out loud "STOP!"

Some people set the timer, but when the timer goes off they simply say STOP" in their mind and picture a stop sign

Some people wear a rubber band or a hair tie around their wrist and when they notice the unhelpful thoughts they give themselves a little snap and either say or think "stop"

Some people go for a quick walk around the block and when they get back to their starting point they either say or think "stop"

As soon as you have ordered the negative thoughts to stop you will want to try to think a thought that is more helpful and balanced and consider starting another task to distract yourself.