

Chimp Therapy for Divers

The 'chimp' is our emotional brain, or limbic system. It has the emotional age of a seven year old child. It's the part that feels fear, joy, love and sadness. And unfortunately we can act on those feelings before our 'human' thinking kicks in.



Generally the human and chimp can get along fine, but if we're stressed by something then the chimp is aroused and our human can lose control of it. When our chimp is out of control, like a drunk, it can't work out whether a thought is true or not.

It takes the intellectual mind to cut in and decide whether the stressor is true or not, worth worrying about, or able to ignore. This is the basis of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). It means challenging your thoughts to see if they are real or distorted.

Ask what you're telling yourself about self or others that's scaring you. What are you telling yourself about the dive to come? Are you putting pressure on yourself? Do you feel others are? What would happen if you don't dive?

Are you thinking in terms of all or nothing, black and white, life or death terms? Are you overgeneralising - the hint is in the language... using 'always' and 'never'. Are you focusing on one detail and obsessing about it e.g. the thought of one swim through on the dive plan leaves you worrying about the whole dive. Are you rejecting other similar experiences that were positive e.g. your last dive to that place or depth. Are you magnifying a weakness e.g. your ability to perform a particular skill and using it as a reason to give up on everything?

If you're using 'should' or 'ought to' in your thinking then it's a red flag that your thinking is not helpful. Often we think too much about the future and want certainty. In reality we can't be certain about the future - if this is unacceptable to you then you might fall into the trap of forecasting the future and if you're thinking negatively you will worry unnecessarily about things that may never happen.

Don't always believe what the chimp is telling you. Believing could lead to you missing out on a dive, or messing one up. A fearful chimp can be very dangerous for diving - if you're stressed and guzzling air, but don't speak up; you could be putting yourself and others in danger when you do an emergency ascent out of air.

When you challenge a thought you step out of the chimp mind and into the human zone. The same happens when you have a problem - if you think of a solution rather than dwell on the why, you step out of chimp thinking.

You can use a thought record to take you through this questioning process. Eventually you can do this in your head without writing it down.

Thought Record

Where am I? What is my situation?	What is my main thought?	How do I feel?	Is this a realistic thought? Are there facts to support it? How likely is it to happen?	Is there an opposite thought, a positive perspective?	How would the alternate perspective make me feel?
<i>At the entrance to a cave, its dark inside, I can't see the exit</i>	<i>I might get stuck if I go inside, I may never come out</i>	<i>Stressed, tense</i>	<i>Probably not - the dive guide wouldn't take us there if it was unsafe. Hundreds of divers come here every month</i>	<i>I will be safe inside, I will come out and I'll enjoy the experience</i>	<i>Comfortable</i>
<i>Three minutes into a static breath-hold</i>	<i>I need to breathe</i>	<i>Tense, discomfort in belly and throat</i>	<i>Last week you held your breath for four minutes, so you know this isn't true</i>	<i>I could breathe, but I don't have to</i>	<i>Relaxed</i>

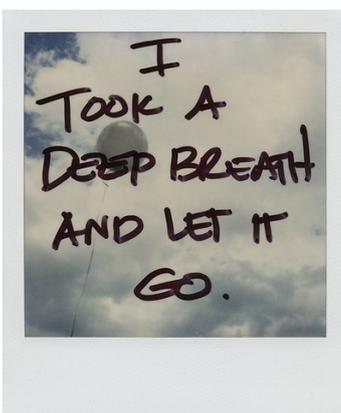
Smile and breathe 😊

Affirmations

Affirmations work well for the chimp because it takes each statement literally. Think of it as speaking to a small child - you need to be brief and concise. Kids can't think abstract thoughts.

Tips for choosing your affirmation;

- Be positive - avoid words like 'not', 'don't', 'won't'
- Be present - avoid words relating to the future 'can', 'am getting' and 'will'. Also avoid 'should', 'could', 'ought to'
- Be precise - many common affirmations are meaningless babble! For example 'I am getting better every day'... better than what? Choose something specific e.g. I am confident, I am graceful, I am dignified
- Make them your own - choose something relevant to you, with a personal reference to your goal(s)
- Include a realistic objective - it can be motivating to include an affirmation that you'll train twice a week, or study every evening. Make it realistic and measurable. And remember to congratulate yourself each time you do it
- Choose 7 - 12 affirmations to repeat several times a day. Try to do for at least 30 days to develop the habit
- Examples might include;
 - I am a good diver
 - The sea accepts me
 - This wreck dive is easy for me
 - I am comfortable at 30m
 - I am a good diver who trains twice a week



What if we encounter a problem that we just can't change or solve? We can either obsess about it, or accept it and let it go. You may need to challenge your expectations.

Sometimes we have to learn to get comfortable with discomfort.