

## EXERCISE: The Alternative-Days Experiment

Plan to conduct the alternate-days experiment over a two-week period. Start by dividing your week into high mental-control and low mental-control days. For example, you could select Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday as low-control days and Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday as high-control days. During low-control days, devote as little attention as possible to consciously controlling your emotional thoughts and affect. During these days, allow yourself to think or feel whatever comes into your mind without consciously trying to control what you are thinking or feeling. That is, let go of your mental-control effort. Then on high-control days, work on paying close attention to your emotional thoughts, and try hard to inhibit any unwanted negative intrusive thoughts and feelings. In particular, try to distract yourself with many different ideas, thoughts, and memories, letting your mind flit from one topic to the next.

Use the next set of questions to reflect on the most important aspects of your mental-control experience. Record your responses at the end of the day in the worksheet that follows, so you can compare the

effectiveness of unfocused distraction during high-control days versus the effectiveness of letting go of control on low-control days. You can also visit [www.overcoming.co.uk](http://www.overcoming.co.uk) to download other copies of the high mental-control vs. letting go of mental-control worksheet.

1. Was using unfocused distraction on high-control days more, less, or equally effective to letting go of control on low-control days? Did you have more, fewer, or an equal number of distressing thoughts and feelings on the different days?
2. Was using unfocused distraction on high-control days more stressful or frustrating than taking a more relaxed approach to mental control?
3. Was your emotional state any better on high-control days than on low-control days, or was it worse? How much better or worse? If there was little difference, is greater effort at control worth it?
4. Can you think of any other advantages or disadvantages to using unfocused distraction on high-control days?

## High Mental-Control Vs. Letting Go of Mental-Control Worksheet

Days	Effectiveness of High Mental-Control Effort	Effectiveness of Low Mental-Control Effort
Monday		
Tuesday		

Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		

Did you notice any benefits to exerting greater mental control, or were the days of low mental control any better? The alternate-days experiment may seem tedious, but I hope you found it helpful in highlighting the negative effects of unfocused distraction and an excessive mental-control effort.