

Student Counselling Office (Zentrale Studienberatung)

The mind bully

The scenario

Let's imagine someone who bullies their schoolmates on the schoolground. This person isn't violent, but they **taunt, tease, laugh and criticise – using cruel words**.

Now imagine a concrete example: A student picks four victims during recess. He says the same thing to each of them: 'Hey, you! You're so stupid. Give me your lunch money NOW or I'm going to tell everyone how dumb you are!' So what do each of these individuals do in response?

- Victim number 1 believes the bully. Frightened, he hands over the money.
- Victim number 2 replies, 'I'm not dumb. I got eight points out of ten on the dictation and you only got four. Get out of here and leave me alone!'
- Victim number 3 tries to brainwash the bully: Each morning she goes to them, looks them in the eye and repeats five times, 'I'm smart!'
- Victim number 4 barely reacts at all. She looks at the bully, registers him, then turns around and goes to play football with her friends.

How will the bully react to each of these people now?

- They'll probably return to victim 1 most days.
- They might try one more time with victim 2, but will probably give up soon.
- They'll probably laugh at victim 3 or remind them of times when they weren't so clever. But if the victim looks them in the eye and says how smart he is again, it's possible the bully might ultimately start to believe him. Then they would probably think up new insults and the victim will have to develop a new brainwashing strategy.
- They'll probably leave victim 4 alone from now on.

Exercise

To become aware of what your mind bully tells you, write down what kinds of things it says to you whenever you notice it.

Keep a tally beside the sentences when they repeat.

Adapted from Russ Harris, *ACT made simple*

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Being aware is the first step. Only once you get to know your mind bully can you stop it from bothering you without you noticing.

As a second step, you get to decide how you deal with the bully:

- Instead of believing the taunt and complying with the demand as victim 1 does, you can decide to react like victim 2. You can learn to respond to your mind bully with logic. Think of your successes and write down logical arguments to counter your mind bully.
- Another possibility is to react like victim 3 and try to retrain your brain with empowering positive thoughts. Sentences that state the opposite of what your mind bully is saying are useful for this.
For example:
Mind bully: 'You'll never manage that anyhow.'
Empowering thought: 'I can do it.'
This exercise is also most effective when you write the sentences down.
- You can also decide to react like victim 4 does: You register the bully, but you don't let them get to you and focus instead on things that are fun, close to your heart or important to you. A possible thought could be 'I'll let you talk. AND: I have more important things to do.'

Think of your own idea for a thought that will help you register the mind bully but not be influenced by it. Write this sentence down.

It will probably take some practice to learn how to deal with the mind bully. Be patient with yourself and know that practice makes perfect.

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