



STATE SHIFTING/or PATTERN INTERRUPTING

By Dr. Gregory Moore

State shifting is a “cognitive” technique that lies in the premise that all thoughts have a neutral, positive, or negative charge. Paying a toll on the parkway will probably be a neutral experience, thinking of an attractive person will lead to positive feelings, and thinking of a visit by an unpopular relative will instill a negative emotion. With this technique, we want to be aware of those thoughts that carry a negative charge and write them down, from least bothersome to most. For example, thinking of taking a test may make us feel anxious at a level of 4 on a 1 to 10 scale. However, thinking of not getting into the college of our choice may be a six out of 10. So, make a list of no more than 4 thoughts that create negative feelings. When you have those thoughts, pick a negative feeling or feelings from the following “menu”:

- Anxious
- Disgusted
- Scared
- Depressed
- Stressed
- Overwhelmed
- Confused
- Shocked
- Anger
- Irritable
- ..or some other negative emotion.

Once you have these, assign them to each thought (eg. Thinking of taking a test is associated with scared, stressed, overwhelmed.) First, close your eyes and create a visual of the scene. For example, imagine yourself in class taking a big test. Now, not only allow yourself to truly feel the feeling (eg. Scared) but try to make it intense by really trying to imagine being freaked out! Got it? OK. Can you see how much that’s affecting you? You don’t want this!

Now, think of something that makes you feel relaxed such as lying on the beach or hanging out with a good friend. Really feel how good this is. OK. Now, as you're feeling really good, switch back to the thought about the test. Try to hold the good feeling as you're doing this. This won't be easy at first but what you are doing is shifting your state of mind from negative to positive. This pairing of good feeling will begin to counteract the negative feelings surrounding your picture of taking that test in class. Again, keep in mind that you must PRACTICE.

After you've done some "dry runs", you should practice during the actual event (just before taking the test). That's when the feelings are most intense.