

Urge Surfing

With Everyday Impulses



1. **Notice the body.** When you become aware of a strong urge or impulse then, notice how the reaction feels in the body. You may notice feelings of tightening or loosening or a feeling of wanting to lean towards or away. There can be hot or cold feelings, sometimes twitches or trembles. Notice if it feels uncomfortable or comfortable. The aim is to briefly notice whatever is going on in the body and explore how it is to allow that reaction to be there, accompanying you, as you continue with the next steps.
2. **Label the reaction** you have noticed. It helps to keep this really simple so as not to get tangled up in lots of thinking about what is happening. Ways of labelling include saying to yourself: ‘*There’s thoughts flaring.*’, ‘*Worry thoughts.*’, ‘*Anxious feeling.*’ or ‘*There is a tight feeling in the belly.*’. Many people find labelling in this way is very helpful and they will come up with their own ways of doing this. Quite a few people, however, find it seems to get in the way or makes things complicated:- if this is the case then just leave this step out.
3. **Choose to direct the attention to a familiar Focusing Anchor** but be really aware of the flare of thought, images, feelings or physical sensations that may be triggered as you make this choice such as relief, reluctance, irritation or curiosity. You may find it helps to label some of these too.
4. **Centre the Attention on the Focusing Anchor.** The pull on the attention can often be very strong. It may be only a moment or two before the attention gets pulled away from the Focusing Anchor and back to the flare of thought and feeling that is being triggered by not immediately acting on the urge or going along with the impulse. It is important to know this is just what will happen as you cannot stop the attention being carried off. What you can do when this happens is choose to once again label what is present and then choose to return the attention to the Focusing Anchor once again.
5. **Take a ‘time-out’.** If you notice you are getting into a struggle with this, often indicated by the body getting tense, a frown on the face or the breathing getting forceful, it is good to broaden the attention out for a little while and just notice all that is going on. Check in to the body, inviting tense muscle to loosen and letting the weight of the body rest into its supports. Perhaps notice the flow of breath in the body. Be aware of what is going on in the mind and the emotional tone. Just linger with this broad awareness as long as you want then return the attention to the Focusing Anchor.
6. **Be easy on yourself.** You might be surprised by how difficult it is to surf the urge of well-established habitual reactions and impulses. Even trivial things like not immediately checking the phone when you hear a text has arrived can create surprisingly large waves of thoughts and feeling. Acknowledging that it can feel very difficult when these thoughts and feelings are present and offering the same warmth to yourself as you might to a friend struggling in the same way is central to gently but progressively developing new ways to respond.

If there is a real struggle consider using the Headspace practice with the thoughts that are present and consider doing the Soothing Paws or Strong Sitting/Standing practice to help wait out the strong urge to subside.

But it is important to be really kind if you find the impulse is so strong that you go along with it. For well ingrained habits this is very likely to happen and is normal. If you find you are being very self-critical or bullying then this is the time to do Headspace or Soothing Paws practices. The thing to focus on is even the tiniest gap between the impulse arising and acting on the impulse. It is this little gap that will grow over time to eventually enable you to choose not to act on the impulse. Even this growth of the gap will be up and down: it is the fact you have acted on the intention to respond differently that will result in ongoing changes in the brain systems so that your ability to act on your intention will get stronger and stronger.