

# Are You Obsessively Repeating Conversations with Your Friends and Acquaintances?

## Objective

To reduce repeating conversations (co-rumination) with friends and acquaintances when dealing with difficulties or challenging situations, and increase collaboration and problem-solving.

## What to Know

Do you find yourself talking about the same thing over and over with your friends and acquaintances? Do you rehash unpleasant events and difficult feelings?

Talking about things that bother you can be helpful because you can sort through your feelings, weigh your options, or come up with creative solutions while getting feedback from others. It usually feels good to talk about your problems with people you are close to because they offer validation and support.

However, if you keep talking about the same problem over and over again without actually coming up with a solution or a plan of action, it can do more harm than good. Psychologists call this type of repeated conversation “co-rumination.” People do it because it “feels” like they are reducing their anxiety about a subject, but in reality, they become more focused on their problems as opposed to finding solutions.

Co-rumination can feel like you are getting or giving help and support. However, repeatedly having the same conversation with people can drive them away and lead to increased anxiety and depression.

Ask yourself the following questions to help you identify whether or not you are engaging in co-rumination.

- Am I talking about the same thing over and over again, particularly issues that make me feel sad, angry, or envious?
- Is this a new problem?
- Have I/we spoken about this before?
- Am I worrying about things that have not happened?
- Do I have any new information, or has the situation changed?

If you think you might be co-ruminating too much, you can stop the pattern. These suggestions can help.

**1. Identify the topics, situations, or people that trigger you.** It helps to be mindful about

your patterns, as well as those that have developed within your relationships. If you identify your triggers, you are more likely to catch co-rumination as it is happening.

What are the topics you tend to ruminate about? Describe.

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Are you more likely to co-ruminate in certain settings or situations? List them.

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Are there certain people you tend to co-ruminate with? Write down their names.

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Even when you are aware of what triggers you, at first it can be hard to catch yourself. So, it is helpful to ask the people closest to you to help you break the pattern. Remind your loved ones you are available to listen to and support them, and that you appreciate it when they do the same for you. Tell them you have noticed you tend to co-ruminate, and ask them to point out when they feel you are starting to ruminate. These discussions give you the chance to talk about support that is helpful, and in turn learn ways that you can be more supportive.

Who can you ask to help you? Write down three names.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Catch yourself and be kind.** By increasing your awareness, you can stop the pattern and come up with solutions. The more you recognize co-rumination as it happens, the easier it will be to problem-solve instead. Be kind to yourself and your loved one when find yourself co-ruminating. Instead of judging yourself or being overly critical, approach it like a game and acknowledge you are becoming better at recognizing the difference between ruminating and problem-solving.

**3. Actively problem-solve.** Often, taking one small step toward resolving the problem can be more helpful than venting to someone. Ask yourself the following questions.

- Is there something I can do to change or improve the situation right now?
- Can I do something to resolve the problem in one small way?
- What can I do differently in the future to prevent similar situations from happening or to cope with them?

**4. Find new ways to cope.** You can develop a self-care routine, write down the pros and cons of possible solutions, or choose healthy distractions. You can also find new ways to feel connected in your relationships, including having meaningful discussions, trying a new activity together, or working on a shared goal.

What can you do to cope, other than co-ruminating? Be specific.

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**5. Collaborate instead of co-ruminate.** Co-ruminating can become a problem when it happens repeatedly. It is fine to occasionally vent – just be aware of how much time it is taking up in your conversations. Set limits so your conversations are not just about venting. In the spirit of collaboration, find a healthy balance to make your conversations helpful and supportive.

Write down ways you can shift from co-rumination to collaboration.

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## Reflections on This Exercise

Did you notice patterns in your tendency to co-ruminate? Explain.

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Why do you think these situations triggered you? Explain.

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Were you able to easily stop yourself from co-ruminating? Why or why not?

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When you had a hard time stopping yourself from co-ruminating, what do you believe caused these difficulties? Could you have done anything differently? Describe.

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What else can you do to break the pattern of co-rumination?

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How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_  
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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