

# Stop Having Conversations Over and Over in Your Head

## Objective

To reduce replaying or rehearsing conversations as a way to reduce anxiety.

## What to Know

Do you replay conversations in your head? Do you worry about whether you said or did something wrong?

Do you rehearse future conversations over and over, thinking about what to say as a way to decrease your anxiety? Practicing what to say once or twice can be helpful but constantly thinking about future conversation often just raises your stress level.

Thinking about something over and over again is called “rumination.” There is nothing wrong about thinking about something repeatedly, say when you are trying to solve a problem, but rumination can be seen as a symptom of anxiety when it becomes obsessive. People who constantly think about past or future conversations to make themselves temporarily feel better typically end up making themselves even more anxious and distressed.

Rumination does not stop worry or lessen anxiety, and it may disrupt your sleep, affect your productivity at work, and increase stress.

Instead of dwelling on conversations, consider the following:

- **You cannot control how others view you.** Other people might judge you, but it ultimately does not matter.
- **People are typically more concerned with themselves than the things other people say.**
- **Reliving or rehearsing conversations will not enable you to control the future or change the past.**
- **The more you ruminate, the more likely you are to get stuck in negative patterns that are unproductive and affect your well-being.**

What can you do to stop ruminating about conversations? Here are some suggestions.

1. If you tend to beat yourself up about what you have said, commit to finding ways to stop ruminating.
2. Recognize when it is happening. Pay attention to when you tend to rehash and replay conversations, and choose to think about something more productive.
3. Thinking about problems is only helpful if you are actively looking for solutions. Ask yourself if there is anything you can do about the conversation. If you did say something you regret, learn from it, apologize if needed, and move forward.

4. Control your worrying by setting aside 20 minutes each day to think, worry, or reflect. Schedule "thinking time" in your planner or calendar. If you notice yourself ruminating outside of the scheduled time, remind yourself that you will think about it later.
5. Distract yourself by finding a task that keeps you busy.
6. Practice mindfulness to stay in the present moment. Over time, mindful awareness can greatly decrease rumination. Often, taking a deep breath and saying to yourself, "You can stop now," is enough to bring you back to the here and now.
7. Praise yourself for your successes and forgive yourself for your mistakes.

## What to Do

When you realize you are starting to replay or rehearse conversations, find a distraction to break the pattern. Choose something else to do, such as:

- calling a friend or loved one
- doing tasks around the house
- watching a funny video
- drawing, painting, or engaging in any arts/crafts project
- reading a book
- walking around your neighborhood
- cooking a meal
- playing with a pet or young child
- clearing your mind to arrive at an emotionally calm state through meditating or deep breathing

What will you do the next time you catch yourself ruminating about a conversation? Choose at least three activities you can do.

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

What are your triggers for replaying or rehashing conversations? Be specific.

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You might talk with a friend or family member to gain perspective. This person can distract you and boost your self-esteem. Be sure to speak with someone who can support you in a healthy way rather than ruminate with you. Who can you talk to? \_\_\_\_\_

For the next two weeks, try to become aware of your tendency to ruminate about conversations. Write down the date, briefly describe the conversation, and note the location, time, what you were doing, and other relevant details. Identify whether or not you successfully stopped yourself from ruminating. Write down what you did (for example, distract yourself, call a friend, and so forth). Write down what you can do differently in the future.

Date	Conversation	Location, time of day, who you were with, what you were doing	Did you stop yourself from ruminating? Y / N	What you did	What you can do differently

## Reflections on This Exercise

Did you notice patterns in your tendency to ruminate about conversations? Explain.

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What triggered you? Describe.

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

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When you had a hard time stopping yourself from 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 ruminating about conversations?

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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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