

Why Your Mind Replays Conversations Over and Over

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What's underneath all that replaying?

In Mind-Body Bridging® (MBB), one of the things we learn to notice is something called a Requirement.

Requirements are the shoulds and musts we carry about ourselves, other people, and the way life is supposed to go.

I should always say the right thing.

People should understand me.

I shouldn't make mistakes.

They shouldn't be upset with me.

An important part of understanding Requirements is recognizing that they belong to us. If my Requirement is They shouldn't be upset with me, that's my rule about how I think the other person should feel or behave. They didn't create that Requirement, and they may not even know I have it.

When something happens that challenges one of our Requirements, the I-System can become overactive. The conversation may have ended hours ago, but our mind keeps working on it.

Why did they say that? Are they mad at me? What did I do? I should've handled that differently. We replay the conversation looking for answers, even when there may not be an answer available to us.

A thought can feel a lot like a fact

When the I-System is overactive, our thoughts can be incredibly convincing.

They're mad at me.

That's a thought.

I embarrassed myself.

Also a thought.

I shouldn't have said that.

Another thought, and one that may point us toward a Requirement.

The thought may turn out to be accurate. It may not. The important thing is that we don't actually have to solve it every time it appears. One of the things MBB helps us practice is recognizing a thought as a thought instead of automatically treating it as a fact that requires our attention. There can be a big difference between They're mad at me and simply noticing, I'm having the thought that they're mad at me. That little bit of space can change what happens next.

Rumination keeps us somewhere other than here

Rumination is a good example of an overactive I-System. It's often a Storyline, the Depressor's version of what a moment means about us, playing on a loop long after the actual conversation ended. The actual conversation happened in the past, but our mind keeps bringing it into the present. Or it jumps ahead into the future.

What are they going to think of me tomorrow?

What if things are awkward now?

What am I going to say the next time I see them?

Our body may respond right along with those thoughts. Our shoulders tense. Our stomach feels off. We have trouble concentrating because part of our attention is still in yesterday's conversation or tomorrow's imagined one.

But neither of those is happening right now. Right now, you may be sitting on your couch, driving home, making dinner, or lying in bed. This is where Coming to Your Senses can help. Notice what you can hear. Feel your feet against the floor. Notice what your body is touching. Look around and take in what's actually in front of you.

You're not trying to get rid of the thought.

You're noticing: That's a thought. And this is what's happening right now

Returning to Natural Functioning

MBB uses the term Natural Functioning to describe what is available to us when the I-System isn't dominating our experience. In Natural Functioning, we're more available to what's actually happening in the present. We're not stuck replaying yesterday or trying to solve tomorrow. That doesn't mean we never think about the past or plan for the future. Both can be useful. The difference is that we can use that information when we need it without becoming consumed by it.

Maybe there really is something from the conversation that needs to be addressed. We can apologize, ask a question, clarify something, or have another conversation. Or maybe we recognize that there's nothing we need to do right now. The goal isn't to never have the thought again. It's being able to notice the thought without letting it take us away from the life that's actually happening.

Want to learn more?

If overthinking regularly keeps you awake, makes it difficult to concentrate, creates stress in your relationships, or takes you away from what's happening in your life, MBB can help you begin recognizing some of the patterns underneath it.

At the MBB Clinic at Utah State University's I-System Institute, Utah residents can receive up to [10 free individual sessions](#) with a trained practitioner. You'll learn practical tools for noticing these patterns and what happens in your mind and body when stress or anxiety takes over.

You can also join one of our [free four-week Building Resilience Through Mind-Body Bridging workshops](#), where you'll learn the basic MBB tools and practice using them in everyday life. Whether you'd rather work one-on-one or learn alongside others, both are opportunities to start noticing your own patterns and discover what helps you return to Natural Functioning.

The goal isn't to never think about a difficult conversation again. It's to recognize when you've gotten what you need from it and give yourself permission to leave the conversation where it happened. You may not get to redo the conversation. But you don't have to keep having it.