

The Overwhelmed Brain

Stop Anxiety!

Your Escape Plan to End the Worry About Unresolved Problems

Introduction

This is an exercise designed to help you decrease, or even completely eliminate the suffering and anxiety you may be experiencing regarding a problem in your life. It will also give you more access to valuable inner resources to help you come up with a solution that you may not have thought of yet.

This workbook is *not* designed to resolve your problems directly, as each problem is unique. But, it *will* help you get out of your *infinite loop of repetitive thinking*.

This repetitive thinking is about all the thoughts you have *about* a problem that you continue to repeat in your head over and over again. I like to call that an “*emotional washing machine*” because your thoughts and emotions go through cycles, just like laundry in the wash.

During my marriage, I was trapped in an emotional washing machine of *pain, repress, pain, repeat*. I kept getting triggered, but didn't express my pain (nor get any professional help for it), so I swallowed my emotions just to have them spring up later, again and again.

An *emotional washing machine* looks something like this:

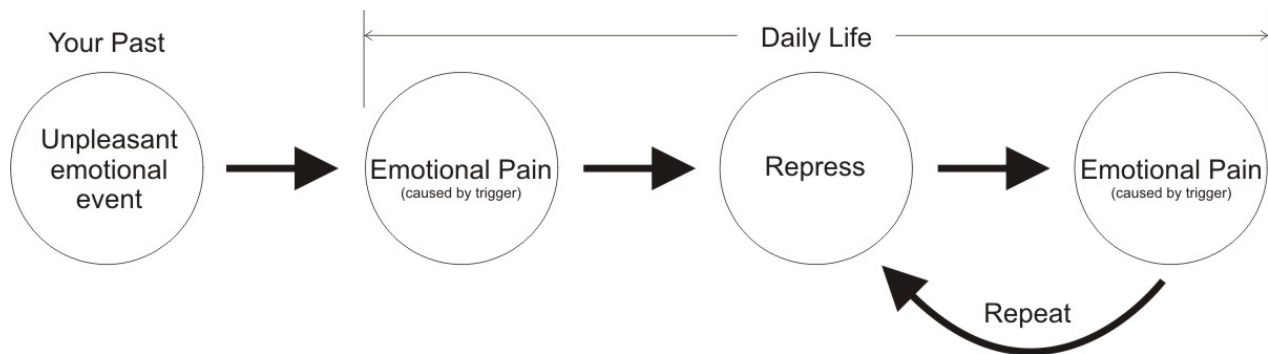
- **Emotional Pain** The fear, hurt, anger or other emotions caused by thoughts of a bad outcome of some sort. This pain can arise unexpectedly (an emotional trigger), or lie under the surface (by being repressed) making you feel bad most of the time.

Emotional pain has an origin - usually a *first event* where you felt the pain for the first time. This is when you learn how to respond every time thereafter to similar events in your life.

- **Repression** This is when you swallow that emotional pain so that you can survive the days while hoping for a solution. This involves stuffing your bad feelings down so you don't have to express or deal with them.

Think of repression as a way for the body to hide pain when you aren't able, or willing, to release it.

- **Emotional Pain** This comes into the picture again because, even though you may swallow your emotions, they still creep up on you. These unexpressed, unresolved emotions can give you anxiety, fear and actual physical ailments such as indigestion, acid reflux, low energy and more.
- **Repeat** Once you've gone through pain, repressed it, then it reappeared, the cycle repeats itself over and over again: *Pain, Repress, Pain, Repeat.*



The emotions you feel about problems today started somewhere in your past (way before the problems you may be upset about today). *Something* happened to you that awoke in you a hurtful emotion you felt for the very first time.

This first event is when you *learned* how to feel what you feel when you're triggered by things now, if that makes sense. In other words, the anger or fear you carry around with you today started in your childhood. You learned the basics of emotional hurt at a very young age.

Later on in life, that same emotion came up again by getting triggered by something. It's the same type of pain you felt as a child, except the context of the situation is likely different.

When you repress these emotions in your day to day life, you are *storing* it inside your body making you feel bad, and just delaying the time until the next trigger which restarts the cycle.

The Pain-Repress-Pain-Repeat cycle continues as long as you never process and / or express and release that pain.

You ever feel this way?

It's like the stress about the problem never comes to a close, leaving you hanging with that uneasy, "unfinished business" feeling.

When I was married and my wife would reach for junk food, she would set off an emotional trigger in me, causing me to *regress* back to a time of not feeling loved.

“Regression” is when you feel and respond like a child would in a given situation.

When I was a child and my stepfather drank, I felt unloved and fearful. After all, when he drank, I believed he didn’t love me. It was a child’s perspective of course, but I held on to that perspective most of my life.

My stepfather turned to alcohol instead of showing me love and attention. And that’s why I’d get triggered when my wife couldn’t control *her* cravings. After all, if she turned to food instead of *me*, “she must not love me”.

When you experience a negative emotion that’s too difficult to handle, most of the time you are in a regressive state. The child in you can take over and you’ll likely behave and respond from that child’s perspective.

It’s as if you still have the same fears as you did when you were a kid.

Anything that you are triggered by *now* derives from an emotional event from your past. For example, if you cringe when someone yells at you, you can probably remember a time when you were very young where you felt threatened by someone yelling at you.

If you typically swallow your emotional pain, it creates an underlayer of unhappiness and misery in your life. And as you hold your thoughts and emotions *in*, your mind and body will eventually present these painful emotions again because something will trigger them.

One day, everything will be going along fine. Then suddenly you’re triggered, and all those hard to handle emotions come up once again (pain, repress, pain, repeat).

The main goal of this exercise is to help get you out of that infinite loop of repetitive thoughts so that you can reach clarity. *Clarity* is what allows you to connect with your valuable inner resources. But it’s extremely challenging to reach clarity when you’re suffering.

Suffering creates brain-fog, where it’s difficult to know what to do or where to turn next. However, when the suffering stops, the fog lifts and the resources reveal themselves.

Resources are the ideas and solutions that come to mind to help you figure things out. They are paths of thought that you either forgot about, or were hidden because you were just too clouded to know they were there.

By the time you’re done with this exercise, you will have more resources from which to draw to help you alleviate the suffering.

The Process

This workbook takes you from suffering and stress, to that place of clarity so that you can start thinking *outside* of the 'problem vacuum'. It's a lot easier to find a solution to a problem when you aren't so embroiled in the suffering.

You'll be guided through a series of questions and statements that will help you go beyond the boundaries of your common thought processes. In other words, you will be thinking in a way you don't normally think.

And because you will be thinking differently, you'll have access to different tools to help you figure out different ways to handle the problems in your life.

You can print this workbook or use a separate piece of paper to write your comments and answer the questions (you'll want *some* way to write things down).

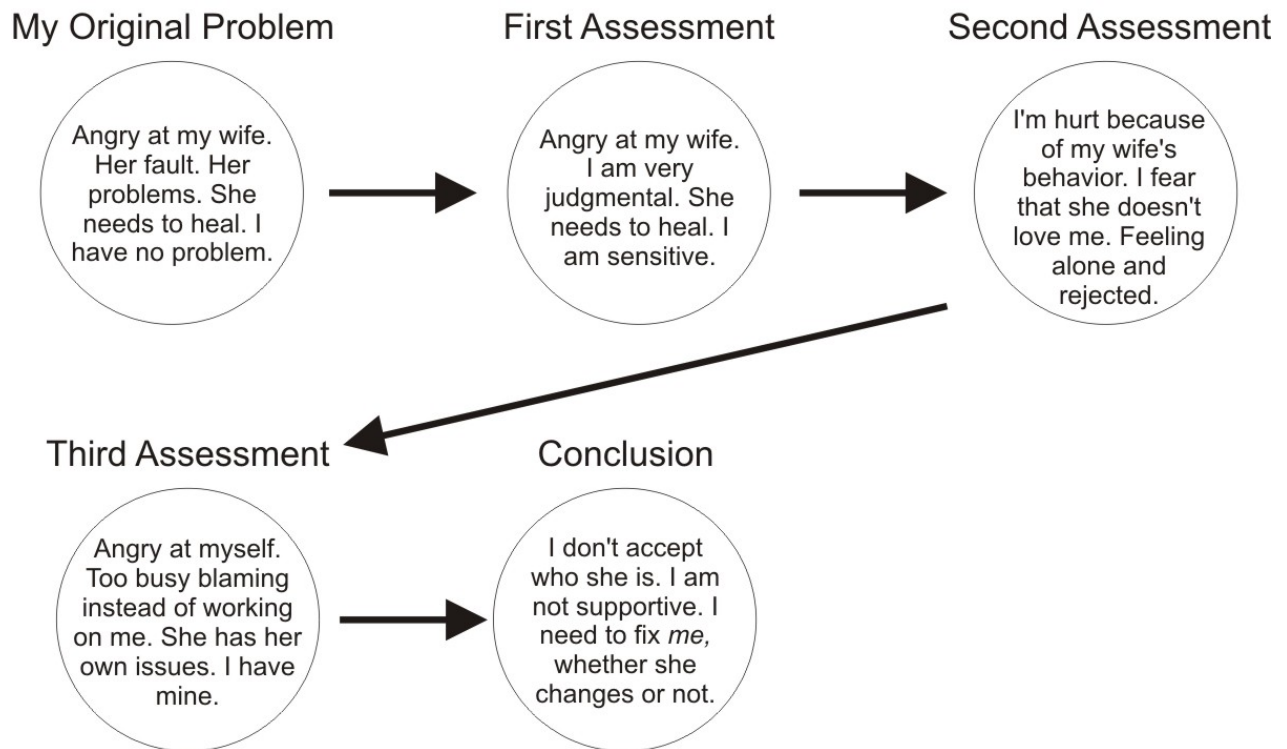
You can also do what I do and use **Notepad** or **TextEdit** on your computer. This will allow you to type and erase easily. It's up to you!

At any time during this process, if a new, more prevalent problem arises, start back at exercise number 1 with the new problem in mind.

Discovering a different problem when you're working on another one is common

And it can happen quite a bit because of the drilling down process that we do. Drilling into a problem reveals what's under the surface.

Here's an example of a problem I had that revealed itself to be something entirely different from what I originally thought. The circles represents what I believed to be the facts at each "assessment" of my problem:



This is how "drilling down" works. It's those layers of the onion you hear about. What you believe the problem *is*, usually isn't - at least not directly. So you drill down to figure out what is *really* causing your upset. In my case, I "knew" she had to change or we'd never progress.

However, after drilling down (a questioning process I'll walk you through), I realized that all the years we were married *I* was the one who needed to change.

I spent so much time waiting for her to fix herself, that I didn't bother looking inward. Sure, she had healing to do, but *my* triggers were *my* problem. And that's what I ended up working on so that I could myself.

Healing yourself is typically a large part of any "problem".

Are You Ready?

It's time to begin.

Just clear your mind for now. *Think about what you like to do on vacation.*

I'm going to ask you to clear your mind every now and then throughout this exercise to help you "reset" your brain before certain questions. This will put you in the best state possible for getting the most accurate answers.

Got that vacation in mind?

Really feel like you're there...

Take as much time as you need. And when you're ready, come back to **now** so we can begin!

1. Think of a problem you have, something that you are *really* emotional about.

I realize there may be other problems *related* to this problem, but think of the most prevalent problem you're having now so we can work on *that*. It's easier to work with one problem at a time.

Got the problem in mind? In one sentence, write out *what* the problem is.

Start with the words, "*The Problem is...*" and finish the sentence.

Examples:

1. *The problem is...* that I am afraid that I won't be able to pay rent this month.
 2. *The problem is...* my boss / spouse keeps yelling at me.
 3. *The problem is...* I don't get the respect I deserve at work.
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2. With that problem in mind, ask yourself, "*How exactly is that a problem for me?*"

This one may sound tricky at first, but write out whatever comes to mind. Be *completely* honest. Use actual words that come to mind. Don't try to clean up your writing to be "proper" or "appropriate".

It's important that you use the exact words that come to mind and get them out.

The idea behind this question is to focus on yourself and how the problem affects *you* directly. In other words, "The economy is collapsing" can be a problem for sure, but how does that directly affect *you*?

If you answer, "Well, if the economy collapses, millions of people could lose their jobs", then you are still not focused on you.

However, if you said, "If the economy collapses, I might lose my job", then you are addressing how the problem affects you directly.

Example:

Question: *How exactly is not paying rent this month a problem for me?*

Answer: *What do you mean "how" is it a problem for me? That's such a stupid question! If I can't pay rent, I'll get kicked out of my apartment. I've never been so broke. I feel like I wasted 8 years of my life married to the wrong person, and now I'm a financial wreck. I'm so embarrassed and ashamed of the decisions I've made that got me here.*

In my answer, the problem I *thought* was a problem was actually just the tip of the iceberg.

I went from being worried about not being able to pay the rent to feeling embarrassed and ashamed for making the wrong decisions in life.

The more you make your answer about *you*, the more you will learn why you have the feelings and emotions you do. This process of making it more about you is called “drilling down”.

Drilling down helps you uncover the thoughts that lead to thoughts that lead to thoughts. In this case, my initial fear about not being able to pay rent was replaced with a deeper layer hurt of regretting the decisions in my life.

It's important to drill down and figure out *how exactly* you're affected by a problem, because it usually isn't the problem itself that's causing you to feel the way you do. The “problem” is just a trigger that brings up some old emotions.

Here's another example:

Question: *How exactly is my stepfather drinking a problem for me?*

Surface Answer: *He's mean when he drinks. He yells and screams, and likes to kick in doors and smash his drinking glass on the floor. He's also loud and obnoxious and disrespects anyone who's around.*

Notice how that answer said nothing about how all those behaviors affect me directly? I don't touch upon the feelings I have about the situation at all, I just explain the situation *assuming everyone would feel the same way I feel about it.*

That's usually the point many people stop drilling. They explain “the problem” and never get into how it affects them directly. They just assume “Everyone is going to think this is awful so I don't *have* to share how I feel about it.”

That's typically why suffering sticks around. When you only explain a problem but don't get into how you feel about it directly, your emotions stay repressed. This creates the *real* problem.

Deeper Answer: *When he drinks, I feel scared. I feel alone and unloved. I feel like he's going to kill me or hurt me really bad. I hate him so much! I wish he would stop drinking or just die and get it over with. Why do I have to deal with this? It's so hard and I'm afraid for my life every day.*

This was a bit more dramatic, *but that's the point!* Drilling down to make it really personal is where you get to express how everything is *really* affecting you at the deepest level. Get right into that vulnerable place inside of you so that you can start to release some of this stuff.

After you write out *your* answer, *re-read it* and figure out if what started out as the problem *is still the same problem*.

If so, continue on to step 3.

If not, and you discovered a deeper, more prevalent problem that you'd like to work on now, start again at step 1.

The problems you have usually stem from a deeper place of anger, pain or fear, which is why oftentimes you'll discover that what appears to be the problem is really a "pointer" to a deeper issue inside yourself.

3. Whatever emotions you wrote down in step 2, ask yourself "Why?"

If you wrote "I'm angry" or "I feel sad when..." or anything else that conveys an emotion, make sure you've answered the "why" of those emotions.

Example:

"Why do I feel angry when he yells at me?"

The answer, "Well, isn't it obvious? No one wants to be yelled at" is a surface level answer. You don't want to stay on the surface, you want to dive in!

The answer, "When he yells at me, I feel hated. I feel like I'm not loved, and I don't feel safe being around him. I want to feel safe, but I can't" is a much deeper answer and closer to a vulnerable truth inside of you.

Get to that vulnerable truth - that's a truth that almost hurts to admit! Those are some of your deepest emotions.

Answer the "why" of your emotions. You can start by saying, "I feel [emotion] about [situation] because..." Remember to keep your answers all about **you**.

Examples:

A. I feel *angry* about *his drinking* because...I feel trapped and scared, like I'm going to get hurt.

B. I feel *scared* about *the economy collapsing* because... I might lose my job and I worry about not having money. Without money, I might not be able to pay for food for my family.

C. I feel *hurt* about *her deceiving me* because...*I want to be able to trust the one I'm with. When she lies to me, I feel disrespected and unloved. I feel like garbage.*

4. Remember the moment the problem started.

It could have been days, or even *years* ago, but remember the moment the problem became "the problem".

Do you remember what exactly caused this problem? Sometimes what happens is what we *think* caused the problem really isn't the cause, but just another symptom of something that happened long before.

For instance, I used to blame my bankruptcy on the mortgage crisis. But after running through this exercise, I realized that way before that, I was making terrible financial decisions most of my life. I never had any savings, and I just purchased whatever I wanted to, never thinking about the future.

I kept up with my bills throughout the years, so I never thought there would be a problem. But when I refinanced my condo, moved out, got a renter, and they stopped paying, everything went downhill from there.

But that series of events was not the *cause* of my problem. The actual cause started many, many years before that when I decided that money was easy to come by and I never needed to worry about it.

Figuring this out helped me to come up with a better plan for my future. It didn't resolve the bankruptcy, but it did help me prevent any further financial disasters *and* make me rethink about what the actual problems in my life were.

If you don't know the cause, or can't answer the question, don't worry! Sometimes just *thinking* about these things is enough to kickstart your brain towards a resolution of some sort.

5. What was your life like *before* the problem started?

Before this problem came to be, and before anything lead up to and contributed to the existence of this problem, what was life like? How were you doing then?

Think of the ways things were different. Were they better? Worse? *What* was different?

Example:

Life was just easier before the bills started to pile up. I'd go to work, come home, and enjoy the night. I could afford to go out to eat if I wanted to, and I was getting paid well. I was really enjoying the fact that I was out of debt and things were going smoothly.

6. Before the problem started, what could you have done differently to prevent it?

Think of at least one thing you could have done. You may not have been able to, but if there is anything you could have done, think of it now.

If there was a life circumstance that was out of your control, then you may not be able to come up with anything. And if so, *give yourself a break!* There are too many variables in life to manage and you're not going to be able to keep track of them all.

If however you could have changed something that would have changed everything, what would it have been? What would you have done differently?

This question isn't designed to make you feel bad or regret your decisions, but to highlight where exactly a situation took a turn for the worse. Sometimes the problems we have are exacerbated even more because we repeat behaviors that led up to them.

You're probably wise enough *now* to not repeat those old behaviors, but step 7 gives you an opportunity to reach inside for some resources just in case you need them again.

7. Besides the way you normally respond or react to the problem, are there any other ways you could behave?

We are absolutely stimulus response creatures. When we smell cookies (or another food you love to smell), we run to the kitchen. The same goes with our reaction to a problem we know well.

I knew *exactly* how to react when my wife reached for junk food. I knew exactly how to feel, how to look, and what to say. I knew it so well that I knew I'd feel bad before it ever happened.

We set ourselves up to feel bad because we respond as we always do.

Set yourself up to feel differently by choosing another response. This doesn't mean you accept the problem, but think about another way you could respond instead of the response you always fall back on.

This might be challenging, especially if you want to own your existing emotions about the problem (i.e. you want to stay angry and find it impossible and deceptive to respond any other way).

The reason I added this item however has to do with what I learned about other people's responses to our responses.

When I learned to respond differently to my wife's behavior, *it changed her behavior*. And that wasn't even my intention. This may not happen with you, and this step is not designed to change another person's behavior. But it *is* designed to start exploring how else you could make the situation less stressful.

When you change, the situation changes. Whether that's other people's behavior, or just how you feel about your own.

Again, this might be a challenging step because it highlights that your reaction to the problem is a "choice", which is something that some people don't believe they have.

In most cases, *it's true - you don't have a choice!*

Generally, you don't have a *conscious* choice to change your **reaction**, but you do have the ability to choose a **response**. It may not be easy, but playing with this can help you understand the response you get now compared to the response you got in the past.

When I chose to respond differently to my wife's behavior, you should have seen her face! She was so confused, that she actually was at a loss on how to behave towards me.

She was so used to being triggered by my trigger, that the subtle change in my behavior derailed her automatic response. This gave both of us an opportunity to improve our situation.

8. What will happen if you don't resolve the problem?

Think of the worst case scenario. And when you think about how bad it can get, go one step further and think of something that could happen that's even worse than that. Be creative and come up with some crazy scenarios if you have to.

This can be hard to do, I realize, because some problems are pretty awful to have. If you have one of those awful problems where the worst case scenario is just too unbearable to think about, just skip this step.

Seriously, don't make it so bad that you have a meltdown unless *you know you can handle it*.

The idea behind thinking about a worst case scenario is that once you do, then whatever you were originally thinking wasn't so bad after all. At least, not as bad as how much worse it could actually get.

I do this as a quick fix for problems I don't have time to think about, nor *want* to worry about. For example, I started a relationship once where the girl I was with gave me an ultimatum. I don't remember exactly what it was about anymore, but it went something like this:

You need to make as much money as I do or I won't be able to commit to this relationship.

That's pretty much an "or else" type of statement, for sure!

After I heard it, I got really fearful and worried. I got sick to my stomach. I was thinking I would certainly lose out if I didn't get a "real" job and start making money.

But I thought, 'Well, what's the worst that could happen?'

She could kick me out of her apartment, I'd have to move back home, and I'd no longer have her in my life.

Wait, that really hurts! How does that help? I decided to press on and figure out what could be worse than that.

I could stay, and she could turn angry and bitter. She could cheat on me and hate my guts when I'm not around, talking bad about me to both her friends and mine.

I thought, yeah, that's terrible too! But what's worse than that?

Even worse? Well, I could get dumped and go broke. I could end up homeless and on the street eating out of garbage cans. I'll never find anyone to love me ever again. I'll die on the street and no one will come to my funeral.

Ouch! That really hurts! But... it's a little fantastical. Has that ever happened to me after a breakup? No, but it *could* get that bad I suppose.

And that's the idea: Take the situation from bad to worse, then even worse. This actually *decreases* the emotional impact of what could *really* happen.

It's really a shift in perspective. You get a bigger picture of the problem, seeing all the things that could go wrong. And because you've thought about how bad it could get, what will actually happen won't have the same impact.

9. Think of what could *actually* happen if you don't resolve the problem.

The worst case scenario doesn't usually happen, especially the way we envision it. So think about what could *actually* happen. It's much different than what you envisioned in step 7, right?

If not, then you weren't creative enough. Go back to step 7 and make it even worse. If you can't do that, don't worry about it! It's not required for this exercise.

Step 8 is all about removing your emotions from the equation.

What could happen, rationally speaking - without emotion, if you don't resolve the problem. I realize emotions are hard to disconnect from the problem, but act as if you are a scientist, and you are just making a hypothesis of what could happen if the situation doesn't change.

i.e. I'll probably get another job, I usually do.

or, I'll probably end up leaving because I will not be able to tolerate the yelling anymore

Just keep it factual and without a personal opinion on the matter, and without emotional words. In my example, I could say:

She'll probably never stop eating sweets, and I'll probably never get over it.

You remember that old catchphrase "Just the facts, Ma'am"? That's how you want to state what could happen. It's the difference between saying,

I'm worried that the yelling will never end and I'll feel miserable

and

The yelling will probably not end and I will likely stay and continue complaining about it

10. Reread what you wrote down in step 2. Does it have the same emotional impact as before?

We've been digging into the problem, tearing it apart, going into the past and the future regarding what happened and what will happen.

At this point, revisit what you first wrote down in step 2 just to find if you still feel the same way about the problem.

Do you feel worse? Better? Indifferent?

If you feel worse, what is the most prevalent feeling you have? Write about why you feel that way.

If you feel better or indifferent, great! Just move on to step 11 where we take the problem through the final process.

11. Run the problem through the *Problem Escape Plan* loop.

Steps 1 through 10 are designed to pick apart your problem piece by piece, and give you a different perspective. It is possible that *something* has changed inside you at this point. Whether that's your feelings about the problem, or your hope that there may be an outcome of some sort.

Regardless of what has changed or what hasn't, this step is the absolute exit from suffering. It doesn't mean the problem will go away, but it does mean you will come to terms with it if you haven't already.

If your problem isn't so much a "problem" for you anymore, then this step will be easy for you.

If however you are still in a place where the problem causes you to suffer, this step is where you get to release the suffering and find your clarity.

Suffering happens because of resistance. When you resist the problem, or what you need to do to deal with the problem, then you cause yourself to suffer.

Here's the process:

Think of the problem.

You got it?

If you can't accept the problem, solve it

Acceptance of the problem would be ideal. Just accept it as a part of life so that you can move on. But what if the problem just cannot be accepted? What if you refuse to accept the problem and just want to solve it?

Then exhaust every resource you can to solve it.

This means talking to people, searching online, hiring professionals, whatever it takes to resolve the problem.

My mom suffered for over 40 years because she had a problem that she didn't choose to solve. My stepfather was an aggressive, abusive alcoholic. My mom was terribly depressed and wanted him to leave.

But she did very little to resolve her situation. She *wanted* things to be different, but she never made them different. She complained about the problem over and over again, but that didn't change anything. It just helped her vent a little.

She didn't talk to the police after his violent outbursts. She didn't leave when she knew she wanted out. She just chose to live with him and suffer, hoping that *he* would eventually leave.

He did leave... and it only took 44 years! That's how long she chose not to seek a solution.

Fear can take over and people looking in from the outside will think you're crazy, just like people did with my mom. People would see her situation and tell her to leave.

She had resources too. She had money and a place to stay, yet she never left him.

She had no love for the person she was living with, and was absolutely miserable. Yet, *she stayed*. Fear *did* take over, and she was scared not know what could happen if she left.

"What if he hurts me? What if he burns the house down?"

The only flaw with that argument is that *he was doing those things anyway!* He was hurting her already, and he was ignorant enough to burn the house down for sure.

We can sometimes get into a situation, hate it, then fear getting out of it because we're afraid of what might happen if we did.

I understand that fear, but I also believe that we make bad decisions when our brain is fogged by fear.

When you are embroiled in the problem, you make poor decisions based on possible, terrible outcomes. It *is* possible that the outcome you envision could come true, which is why you need to plan accordingly.

But you if absolutely cannot accept the problem, you do whatever it takes to solve it.

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What if you can't solve it?

If you can't solve the problem, adapt to it

Adapting to a problem is a step you take when there is no accepting or resolving, so you adapt. Adapting just means making the best of things.

You do what you can to get through the day, and just know that *it is what it is*, and you're okay with adapting to it.

That's the key: *Being okay adapting to it.*

I had a sciatic nerve problem for over 15 years. The last few years were the worst. I realized that there was absolutely nothing I could do to resolve it, nor did I want to accept it, but I *did* adapt to it.

Adapting is a sort of acceptance, because you know it won't go away. When I did this however, I realized that by adapting to the problem, I was accepting my limitations!

That was a surprise, because I realized I didn't *want* to accept my limitations. I just wanted to be out of pain. But, by adapting, I starting embracing the facts.

The facts were:

- I am in pain
- I have limited mobility
- I cannot do many physical activities
- And sitting will always cause more pain

Previously, I did not want to accept these limitations. If I did, I felt like less of a person. But when I finally did give in and accept, *life became so much easier.*

I embraced the facts. I accepted my weaknesses. I stopped resisting, which stopped the suffering. Adapting is a level of accepting. It doesn't mean I want to keep the problem, it just means I've become okay with it and have chosen to work with what I have instead of what I want to have.

It made all the difference in the world.

How can you adapt to the problem? How can you simply work with it because “it is what it is”?

Or...

If you can't adapt to the problem, walk away from it

Get out of the situation. Get out of that relationship. Get away from that job. Remove the problem from your life.

If something is just intolerable to the point you can't handle it anymore, you need to get away from it. Even a temporary reprieve every now and then is better than never.

This is what my ex-wife did. She found my previous judgment issues to be too much for her, so she decided to leave. She realized how much better she felt being away from the problem (me), and when she was truly alone without my presence in her life, she knew she made the right decision.

When my stepfather finally left my mom, and my mom had some actual alone time, she realized her power again. She felt so free and started thinking more clearly than ever.

Once she was alone, she knew that she would never take him back again. This was much different than earlier where she considered taking him back just after he left. But 40+ years of the same situation made her comfortable in a dangerous situation.

Once she was out of that situation, her true, unclouded thoughts came up and she became empowered.

My ex-wife was able to think clearly once she was away from me. Getting out of a situation gives you clarity. It's a powerful step towards freer thinking, and gets you closer to the resolution of a problem faster.

If you can walk away, do it. If not...

If you can't walk away from the problem, accept it

This is where we come full circle. Can you accept the problem as something that will always exist? Can you come to terms with it to the point where the only escape from the suffering is full acceptance of its existence?

Most of us consider mosquitos a problem, yet we can't really eliminate them completely. So, do we suffer, worrying about mosquitos day and night? Are they continuously on our mind?

Probably not.

But why not? After all, they are a problem that will never go away.

Their existence does not consume your thoughts because you've likely accepted them as a part of life. You've found ways to deal with them and avoid them, and you probably don't want to spend too much time and energy thinking about them because they will never go away.

Besides, *you have no solution to the problem.*

You've *accepted* mosquitoes, even though you don't like them. If not mosquitoes, think of anything that bugs you but doesn't consume your thoughts. For example, we hear bad news all the time on TV and radio, but if you thought about that bad news all the time (and I realize some people do), you would suffer.

But since you have to live life and keep moving forward, it would slow you down to think about all that stuff all the time. So you just accept that bad stuff happens to good people and move on. You don't like it, but you accept that it's a part of life.

Acceptance does not mean you stop trying to resolve the problem. It means that you stop suffering so that you can think clearly and the resources you need to resolve it or come to a better place with it will appear.

You have powerful inner resources that will light a path to a resolution of some sort. Suffering is pointless when you have a choice to accept what's happening.

You can continue looking for ways to improve your situation, but at least you don't have to suffer because of it.

My sister has a child that will grow up needing assistance for the rest of his life. This means that for the whole time he is alive, she and her husband will need to attend to his needs.

I'm sure they want a night off now and then, but those are far and few between. But, what else can they do? Hiring a nurse might be an option, but I don't think they're made of money. So how can they get through the fact that for the rest of their lives they'll be taking care of adult child?

They just accepted it.

"That's how it is, and that's how it will be. There is absolutely nothing we can do, so we will just do our best. We know there are hard times ahead, but our goal is to raise him the best we can."

The bigger vision is extremely helpful in this case. When you are guided to raise him the best you can instead of worrying about all of what that entails, you can be more comfortable with acceptance.

That doesn't mean that they'll refuse help or continue looking for the latest treatments, it just means that they've become comfortable knowing that life will be somewhat uncomfortable at times.

It is what it is.

However, what if you can't accept it? This is where you test your tolerance for futility.

Do you want to continue spinning through the endless emotional washing machine cycle of pain, repress, pain, repeat? Or do you want the suffering to end?

If you haven't found your exit from suffering yet, read this again and follow it carefully:

If you can't accept the problem, solve it

If you can't solve the problem, adapt to it

If you can't adapt to the problem, walk away from it

If you can't walk away from the problem, accept it

And the very last step:

Repeat this process until the suffering ends

This is where you have the opportunity to exit the loop, and escape the futility of the endless cycle of suffering. Some people want to hang on to their problem so tightly, they will refuse to believe there is a way out of the suffering.

Or, they believe by accepting or adapting to it, that it means they are *okay* with it. The truth is, acceptance and adapting are sometimes the only path to a solution.

Your brain can be foggy with the suffering of a problem, causing you to never see a solution, or it can be clear, allowing you to think more easily about what can be done.

Endless thinking and pining about the problem is futile. And repeating this four step process is actually an exercise in futility. Because soon you will realize that you *must* choose an exit. You *must* choose your escape route, otherwise, you will stay in the loop continuing to feel bad day after day.

Once you choose the exit, you experience freedom, insight and wisdom. And with these things comes resolution of some sort.

Whether that's the materialization of inner resources or being able to find the right people to help you or something else. But once you get to a hopeless point, where the suffering just seems to be a repetition of the same thoughts over and over again, exiting the cycle is the path of least resistance and most change.

Conclusion

Problems can be as small as a mosquito or as large and complex as a divorce gone bad (and those can be pretty bad). The most important component I want you to take away from this exercise is that when you get your problem out of the box that it's in, to be explored in a way that is outside of normal thought, you get to re-evaluate the problem from a new perspective.

Sometimes you get stuck *inside* the problem, and can't approach it objectively. The problem starts, you immediately assess how it affects you, then you create the "box" of everything you've tried to do to resolve it.

This box exists because you believe "I've tried everything!", yet that may not be true. But because you developed a belief that nothing more could be done to resolve it, you can start to suffer.

Re-evaluate your problem. How is it different now? How are you different? Has anything changed at all?

Have you gained any insight about yourself through this process?

I hope this has been educational for you, and you are able to improve in all areas of your life. If you have any questions, feel free to write me at paul@theoverwhelmedbrain.com.

I'm happy to assist you, or at least point you in the right direction.

Thank you for using the Problem Escape Plan workbook. If you found this valuable to you, visit <http://theoverwhelmedbrain.com/deeper-learning> to discover even more ways to improve yourself and create the life you want.

You are amazing!

Sincerely,
Paul Colaianni
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