

# Rumination: When Overthinking Becomes a Trap



**Rumination isn't just overthinking, it's a loop of emotional distress disguised as "problem solving."**  
It often feels helpful, but it keeps us stuck in the past and disconnected from the present.



## What It Sounds Like

- "Why did that happen?"
- "What could I have done differently?"
- "I should have said..."
- "If I could do that again, I would have..."
- "Why do I feel this way?"
- "Ugh, why am I like this?"
- "What if it happens again?"



## The Truth

Rumination is often a trauma-informed survival skill.

If you've experienced moments where being unprepared led to pain, your brain may default to replaying events as a way to "prevent it" from happening again. But now, instead of protecting you, it may be costing you peace.



## Why We Ruminate

- We feel powerless, and thinking gives us a false sense of control.
- We're trying to make meaning out of pain.
- We believe more thinking will lead to clarity.
- We're conditioned to analyze instead of feel.
- We instinctively keep returning to the moment of distress.



## Interrupt the Loop

- Name it → "I'm looping."
- Ask → "Is this helping or hurting?"
- Redirect → Into action, acceptance, or grounding.

**"You can't heal by punishing yourself. You heal by listening differently."**

## WORKSHEET: From Rumination to Reflection

### Turning stuck thoughts into self-compassionate insight

#### Step 1: Name the Loop

Think of three things that make you apprehensive or anxious?

Write the ruminating thoughts exactly as it shows up:

Example: "Why didn't I speak up?" or "I should've handled that better."

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#### Step 2: What's Underneath?

Ask yourself:

1. What emotion is underneath this thought?

(e.g., fear, guilt, shame, insecurity, anger, sadness)

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#### Step 3: What is this thought trying to do for me?

(Is it trying to protect me, prepare me, or make sense of something?)

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#### Step 3: Reframe Your Thoughts into a Reflection Prompt

Flip your rumination into a kind, helpful reflection question.

Use this structure:

"What can I learn from this..." or "What would it look like if I responded with compassion?" Write your new prompt:

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Examples:

From: "Why did I mess that up?" → To: "What can I learn from that moment without blaming myself?"

From: "Why can't I do more?" → To: "What would enough look like if I showed myself compassion?"

How did it feel to reframe the thought?