

Why Does My Brain Keep Replaying Embarrassing Moments? *By Allison Sramek, MSc, MFT, MBACP Registered*

"Why did I say that?"

"Did I make any sense?"

"I should have just kept my mouth shut."

"Why can't I stop thinking about it?"

If any of those thoughts sound familiar, you're not alone.

Most of us have replayed a conversation in our minds at some point, wishing we had said something differently or worrying about how we came across. Sometimes it lasts for a few minutes. Other times, it follows us for days.

If you've ever found yourself stuck replaying an embarrassing moment, I want you to know that there's nothing "wrong" with you. Your mind is usually trying to do something it believes is helpful—even if it doesn't feel that way.

Why does this happen?

Replaying embarrassing moments is rarely just about the conversation itself. More often, it's about what that conversation meant to you. Perhaps you wanted to make a good impression, hoped people would like you, or worried about how you came across. When something doesn't go the way we hoped, our mind starts searching for answers.

"What did I do wrong?"

"Why did I say that?"

"What should I have said instead?"

We convince ourselves that if we think about it for long enough, we'll eventually find the perfect answer. Unfortunately, that answer rarely comes. Instead, the replay often leaves us feeling even more embarrassed, ashamed or self-critical than we did in the first place.

Your brain is trying to protect you

As frustrating as it feels, your brain isn't trying to make you miserable. It's trying to protect you. It reviews the conversation almost like it's studying for an exam, hoping it can stop you from making the same "mistake" again.

The problem is that people and conversations aren't exams. There usually isn't one perfect answer or one perfect thing you should have said. Sometimes, the more we replay a moment, the more power we give it.

A different question to ask yourself

This is a question I often ask clients.

Instead of asking yourself, "*Why did I say that?*" or "*What should I have said instead?*", try asking a different question:

How is replaying this actually helping me?

What are you really getting from going over the same conversation again and again? Has replaying it changed what happened? Has it made you feel any better? Or has it simply kept you stuck in that same uncomfortable moment?

Sometimes we become so focused on finding the "right" answer that we forget to ask ourselves whether replaying it is helping us at all.

Sometimes changing the question is enough to change your perspective.

What can help?

Rather than trying to force the thought away, give yourself permission to think about it—but with some boundaries.

You might decide to spend five or ten minutes reflecting on what happened. Ask yourself if there's anything genuinely useful to learn from the experience. If there is, take that lesson with you. If there isn't, gently remind yourself that you've thought about it enough for today.

You don't have to keep inviting the thought back every time it appears.

It can also help to remember something we often forget. More often than not, we judge ourselves far more harshly than other people do. Most people are far more focused on themselves than they are on analysing everything you've said.

A final thought

We've all had moments we'd love to replay differently. That's part of being human. One awkward conversation doesn't define you. One comment doesn't tell your whole story. Sometimes the kindest thing you can do is allow yourself to learn from the experience, give yourself a little compassion, and let the moment pass.

Because you deserve to spend more time living your life than replaying it.

A gentle reminder: This article is intended to offer general information and reflection. If these thoughts feel familiar and they're beginning to affect your daily life, therapy can provide a safe space to explore them in more depth.

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