

## Why Do I Overthink Everything?

Have you ever replayed a conversation over and over in your mind, wondering whether you said the wrong thing? Perhaps you've found yourself thinking:

*"Did I upset them?"*

*"Should I have handled that differently?"*

*"Did my boss think I wasn't good enough?"*

*"Could I have explained myself better?"*

Maybe you replay the entire conversation from beginning to end, searching for something you might have missed. By the time you finally get into bed, your mind is still analysing what happened hours earlier. You know there is nothing you can do about it in the middle of the night, yet the thoughts keep coming. Some people describe lying awake with a racing heart, cold sweats or a sense of dread as they replay the same situation again and again.

If this sounds familiar, you're certainly not alone.

Many people tell me, *"I just can't stop overthinking."* They describe feeling mentally exhausted, frustrated with themselves and desperate for their minds to switch off.

## It's Rarely About Thinking Too Much

Most people assume the problem is simply that they think too much. In my experience, it usually runs much deeper than that. When we begin exploring these patterns together, clients often describe thoughts such as:

*"Did I make things worse?"*

*"What if they took it the wrong way?"*

*"I should have said something different."*

*"Maybe if I keep thinking about it, I'll work out what I should have done."*

On the surface, this looks like overthinking. But underneath, it is often something else entirely.

Many people aren't replaying conversations because they enjoy analysing them. They're replaying them because somewhere deep down they worry they weren't good enough, that they embarrassed themselves, disappointed someone or somehow got it wrong.

The mind believes that if it can replay the situation enough times, it might finally find the perfect answer. Unfortunately, it rarely does.

## What's Really Behind Overthinking?

For many people, overthinking isn't really about the conversation itself. It's about trying to prevent something painful from happening again. Our minds are remarkable problem-solvers. When something feels emotionally uncomfortable, they naturally begin searching for answers.

*"What could I have done differently?"*

*"How can I stop this happening again?"*

*"What if they think badly of me?"*

The intention is often protective. Your mind is trying to keep you safe from criticism, embarrassment, rejection or failure. The difficulty is that some situations simply don't have perfect answers. No amount of replaying a conversation can change what has already happened. Instead, overthinking often leaves us feeling even more anxious, exhausted and uncertain than we did before.

## **Where Do These Beliefs Come From?**

There isn't one simple explanation.

Some people grew up feeling they had to get everything right. Others remember being compared with brothers or sisters, feeling criticised when they made mistakes or believing they always needed to achieve more. Some experienced bullying or relationships where they felt judged, misunderstood or never quite good enough. Others developed perfectionistic standards, believing that every conversation, every decision and every interaction had to be handled perfectly.

Even people who appear incredibly successful can struggle with these beliefs. Over the years I've worked with people who have achieved remarkable things in their careers, education and creative lives, yet still leave a conversation wondering whether they sounded foolish or whether someone secretly thinks they aren't capable enough.

Success doesn't always silence self-doubt.

## **One Question I Often Ask in Therapy**

One question I sometimes ask clients is: **What does all this overthinking actually do for you?**

Does it help? Does it leave you feeling calmer? Does it help you solve the problem?

Or does it leave you feeling even more worried than before? Sometimes clients pause for a moment before quietly saying,

*"It just makes me feel worse."*

That moment can be incredibly important. Not because they suddenly stop overthinking, but because they begin to notice the pattern. Rather than protecting them, the overthinking has slowly become another source of distress.

## **How Therapy Can Help**

One of the goals of therapy isn't to stop thoughts appearing altogether. After all, we all think, reflect and worry from time to time. Instead, therapy helps us develop a different relationship with our thoughts.

Rather than believing every thought needs to be analysed, challenged or solved immediately, we gradually learn that thoughts can simply be noticed. We can become curious about them. Reflect on them.

And sometimes... allow them to pass without chasing them any further.

As clients begin understanding where these patterns come from, they often discover they no longer need to give every thought quite so much attention. Over time, many people find they feel calmer, sleep better and spend less energy trying to solve problems that don't actually have solutions.

## Final Thoughts

Overthinking can feel relentless. It can convince us that if we just think a little harder, we'll finally find certainty, prevent mistakes or protect ourselves from being hurt. Yet more often than not, it simply leaves us feeling mentally exhausted.

Understanding why we overthink isn't about blaming ourselves.

It's about recognising that our minds are often trying to protect us in ways that no longer serve us. When we begin to understand that, we can start responding to our thoughts with greater compassion instead of frustration.

Sometimes the goal isn't to think less. Sometimes it's learning that we don't have to believe or follow every thought that enters our mind.

 **Therapist's Reflection:** Over the years, one of the things I've noticed as a therapist is that people often come to therapy believing they simply need to stop overthinking. As we begin exploring their experiences together, we usually discover that overthinking isn't really the problem. More often, it's a strategy their mind developed to try to protect them from embarrassment, rejection, criticism or getting something wrong.

The mind keeps replaying conversations because it hopes that somewhere in those memories is the perfect response that would have prevented the discomfort.

Yet that perfect response rarely exists.

One of the most rewarding moments in therapy is watching someone realise they don't need to analyse every conversation or question every decision. They begin to understand that they can have an uncomfortable thought without following it, replaying it or trying to solve it.

Perhaps the goal isn't to stop thinking altogether. Perhaps it's learning that your mind doesn't have to work so hard to keep you safe.

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