

## Sneaky thoughts and sticky feelings keep you stuck

This post is about what underpins unwanted repetitive behaviours you struggle to change, that is when you are stuck. You know the downside of these behaviours. And you know what you need to do differently, but you can't seem to get unstuck.

Why does this happen? And what can you do to prevent it from happening?

### Why do you get stuck?

The truth is, 'stuck' behaviour cycles reflect our mindset. They are the observable manifestations of how you think and feel. In essence, your thoughts create your emotions, and your emotions dictate your actions. As you think so you feel and act.

The stuck equation goes like this...

**Sneaky Thoughts + Sticky Emotions = Stuck Behaviour Patterns**

Thoughts are sneaky because they are largely unconscious, out of your awareness and creep up on you. Emotions are sticky because they are difficult to shift, defy logic, and keep you in their grip.

Here are four common examples of 'stuckness', each expressed as an equation.

#### **Perfectionism**

When you have perfectionist thinking, you put things off for as long as possible because your anxiety (sticky emotion) about completing the task in a less-than-perfect way is high. If it is not perfect, it's deemed a failure; it's never good enough. You question the 'right' place to start or the 'best' way to approach the task. You are stuck.

*Perfectionism + Anxiety = Stuck.*

#### **All-or-nothing thinking**

Closely related to perfectionism is all-or-nothing thinking. You think in absolutes. Completely good or bad, entirely right or wrong. There is no middle ground, no shades of grey. You ignore progress and overlook successes. You might give up on plans prematurely and miss opportunities. You describe events using extreme language like always, never, and everything. Your thinking is rigid, keeping you stuck.

*All-or-Nothing Thinking + Misunderstood = Stuck*

#### **The tyranny of shoulds**

"I should be better at this task, this relationship, achieving this goal. Relentless self-criticism and judgement result in feelings of worthlessness because the 'shoulds' tell us that we don't measure up and that we aren't making the grade. Confidence gets eroded and you feel you can't step up to challenges and realise your potential.

*Shoulds + Worthlessness = Stuck*

#### **Negative self-talk**

More often than not, negative self-talk reflects deeper feelings of shame, and shame is the stickiest emotion there is. 'How could I be so stupid?' 'What is wrong with me?' 'I am such a loser.' Each of these negative self-talk statements is sneaky because they happen mostly underneath our conscious awareness. They may pop up, even when you're in the midst of doing something else.

*Negative self-talk + Shame = Stuck*

Remember, the overarching equation is *Sneaky Thoughts + Sticky Emotions = Stuck Behaviour Patterns*. When you focus only on the behaviours you want to change rather than the thoughts and feelings (emotions) that are causing them, you are much more likely to stay stuck.

### What can I do?

#### 1. Focus on sneaky thoughts

The first step is to shift your attention away from your behaviour and toward your thoughts. Bringing your thoughts into your awareness allows you to challenge and change them. Tune in and listen to what you are saying to yourself. Determine if you are falling into these common, sneaky thoughts described above. Identify others that may get you caught in sticky feelings. If you catch yourself being perfectionistic or engaging in all-or-nothing thinking, change it. Reframe your thinking and experiment with a new way of viewing a situation. A slight shift in thinking can go a long way toward getting unstuck.

#### 2. Practise feeling your emotions

Remember, all feelings are felt in your body. Know how to tune into them. For example, are you afraid to volunteer to give a presentation because you might not know enough, might make a mistake, or be seen as stupid. This fear is entirely valid. Acknowledge and accept your fear. It is real. Then act on it. Question: How can you tell if your emotions are sticky? Answer: When they stick around.

Actions are a sign that you aren't stuck! They help your emotions follow a natural course from intense to a low level of discomfort. Instead of avoiding or wishing it away, tune in to your feelings. Practise a few deep breaths and then allow the feeling to pass. Remind yourself that all feelings are natural, and they are messengers that can guide us out of feeling stuck. The more you practise feeling your emotions, the less likely you are to get caught in them.

#### 3. Set realistic and small goals

The steps set out in this post take time. The more you practise tuning into your thoughts, feeling your emotions and treating yourself with kindness and compassion, the easier it is to move out of feeling stuck and toward the way you want to live. Start by saying just one encouraging thing to yourself each morning or adopt an attitude of curiosity about your emotions rather than self-judgement. No matter how you begin, start small and keep going.

### Acknowledgement

In preparing this post, I have drawn on:

- The writing [Dr Robyn Pashby](#)
- James Allen's [As a man thinketh](#)
- Lynn Clark's [SOS for emotions](#)
- My post [Never good enough](#)