

Overcoming Self-Doubt

Self-doubt is the opposite of confidence. Self-doubt is a decision not to try.

But the good news is that this is only a habit. And, you can understand how to overcome these self-doubt traps by understanding **WHY the brain hesitates**.

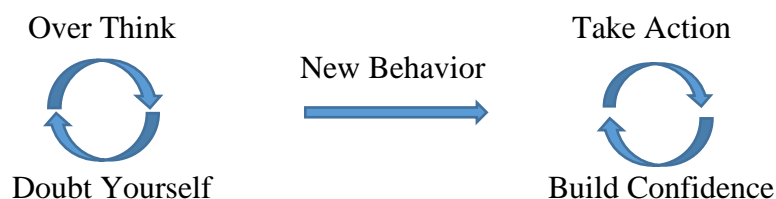
Our brain's #1 goal at all times is to keep us alive. Evolutionary psychology shows us that there are good reasons that our brains hesitate or respond with fear. Unfortunately, the original reasons we evolved this way don't apply today. We're not being hunted by saber-toothed predators anymore, yet we still have brains that are wired to **AVOID UNCERTAINTY**.

The way your brain protects you from uncertainty is to get you stuck in your head, thinking, in order to prevent you from taking any action that it deems risky (such as risk of failure, discomfort, embarrassment, uncertainty). It starts with an immediate feeling of hesitation or resistance. "Wait. What could go wrong?"

The good news is that you can counteract your brain's instincts by understanding that this resistance and avoidance is simply a habit of thought and action (or, better said, inaction).

The Self-Doubt Habit Loop

When your brain hesitates and gets you to start overthinking, it stops you from taking action when you need to. Then, because you didn't take action, you doubt your ability to take action. And, because you didn't take action, you weren't successful with whatever you wanted to do, and so you develop self-doubt. This, of course, leads to more over-thinking the next time something comes up. It's a circle that spins around and around until you break the cycle.



How to Stop the Cycle

- 1) Understand that emotions are normal.
- 2) Understand that your brain can be rewired.
- 3) Understand the 4 traps of self doubt, including which one you tend to get stuck in the most.
- 4) Take action.

Doubt 1: Hesitation

Hesitating is triggered by uncertainty.

Looks like: waiting, overthinking, perfectionism. (Characteristic: BUSY)

Behaviors:

- Telling yourself a story of what could go wrong
- Not putting something out there until its perfect
- Making a plan but then not acting on it
- Staying busy with avoidance mechanisms to avoid dealing with something

Solution:

Step 1: Become aware of what hesitating looks like for you.

- What behaviors do you do when you hesitate?
- What do you tend to tell yourself?
- What activities do you do to avoid acting?
- What do you tend to overthink about?
- What are you waiting to be perfect?

Step 2: Start small. Take baby steps.

Instead of thinking of the big picture and all the details of what it will take and what could go wrong, break the situation down into tiny chunks and focus on only the next step.

ACTIVITY: Every morning, write down one thing that matters to you and one thing you can do today to move forward. It can be simple, like having a conversation, researching something, or buying a book.

Doubt 2: Hiding

Hiding: Triggered by fear of others and overwhelm.

Looks like: Avoiding, procrastinating, shrinking back, staying behind the scenes.
(Characteristic: QUIET)

Behaviors:

- Focusing on big dreams, leading to overwhelm, an excuse not to act, and feeling paralyzed
- Not standing up for yourself or asking for what you want
- Actively protecting yourself and holding yourself back
- Being able to identify a dream and feel passionate about it but not having an actionable plan
- Shrinking back from opportunity and playing it small
- Afraid of being judged, looking like a fool, or disappointing or upsetting others

Solution:

Step 1: Identify what you're afraid of and minimize the fear.

- In what areas do you tend to hide and procrastinate?
- When you find yourself hiding and procrastinating, what is the fear that causes it?
- Why does this thing you're afraid of matter?
- Does it ACTUALLY matter?
- What could you do about it?

Step 2: Identify the avoidance mechanisms you use to procrastinate.

- What do you tend to do when you procrastinate (what behavior are you doing instead of what you should be doing)?

Step 3: Identify what you actually WANT.

- What is the big dream you use to overwhelm yourself and avoid taking action?
- Break down your big dream into actionable goals or steps. What do you actually need to accomplish and what are 5 to 10 sub-goals or steps?

Step 4: Take small steps that move you toward your goals.

What is one small step you can take every day to make progress? See the activity under the Hesitating Trap.

Doubt 3: Hypercritical

Hypercritical: Triggered by fear of being hurt, disappointed, or failing.

Looks like: Arguing against yourself, being self-critical, complaining (Characteristic: NEGATIVE)

Behaviors:

- Looking for and focusing on flaws
- Focusing on why you can't do it
- Fixating on what can go wrong
- Lawyering things to death
- Knowing what you need to do but always having excuses why it won't work
- Believing you can't, it's not possible

Solution:

Step 1: Identify the excuses you're using to hold yourself back.

- What excuses do you tend to use?

Step 2: Identify what you're afraid is going to happen?

- What negative outcome do you believe is going to happen?

Step 4: Eliminate the excuse.

- What can you do to eliminate this obstacle or possibility? (See the Overcoming Fear section.)

Step 3: Make a DECISION that you're going to commit to giving it your all for a certain period of time, giving yourself a chance to prove yourself wrong.

Example: A man feels like he cannot start a business because he fears he won't be able to provide for his family's needs. So, his choices are to:

- a) Eliminate the excuse by getting a job
- b) Commit to giving his dream 100% no matter what
- c) Commit to giving his dream 100% for 2 months and then if it's not providing an income by then, he can get a job and keep working on his business

Option c is often the best solution for someone who is hyper critical. The key to overcoming being hypercritical is to find a solution instead of just complaining. Remove the excuse and take massive action. (See the Massive Action video for more.)

Doubt 4: Helplessness

Helplessness: triggered by insecurity or low self-worth. Helplessness is a fear of success.

Looks like: playing the victim, blaming, lack of self-trust, dependency, defeatist attitude
(Characteristic: PITY)

Behaviors:

- Belief that “nothing ever goes my way”
- Blaming others or the outside world for all outcomes in life (an extreme external locus of control)
- Having every excuse in the book
- You’ve learned that “poor me” gets you sympathy and attention from others
- Overly overdependent on others
- Feeling like the world owes you something
- False sense of incompetence or that you can’t handle your problems
- Lack of self-trust; you don’t believe you can do it alone
- Unwillingness to be vulnerable
- Won’t “do for” yourself—always wanting others to “do for you”
- Fear of success because deep down you fear that if you were to succeed on your own you would lose the support of others
- Lack of taking responsibility for your life
- Acting like you’re giving others control of you because you need them but in reality you’re controlling them with your need
- If being helpless doesn’t get you the caretaking you desire, you’ll resort to intimidation or coercion
- Underlying feelings of anger at being expected to be responsible and self-approving when you’re still trying to get the approval and attention you never got as a child

Solution:

Step 1: Identify in what areas you feel helpless and what beliefs support the feeling.

- What areas in your life do you feel helpless in?

- For each, what do you believe about yourself or this areas that makes you feel helpless?

Step 2: Identify who you are dependent on.

- Who do you portray your helpless self to?

- For each, what type of “helper” are they? Fixer, rescuer, advice giver, enabler, caretaker, guru? Which issues do you focus on with each person?

Step 3: Identify what you are afraid of that leads you to not want to take responsibility.

- What are you afraid of losing (or other negative consequence) if you were to be self-sufficient and accept personal responsibility for yourself?
- In what way can you see that the OPPOSITE is true? Meaning, can you see that you would, in fact, gain these things (that you're afraid of losing) if you were to take responsibility for yourself? (For instance, if you're afraid of losing love, can you see that by removing your dependency you will actually receive more love and appreciation from others?)

Step 4: Show yourself that you are capable of taking responsibility for yourself.

- What evidence can you remember from your past that you CAN do it?
- What specific areas do you already know you are capable of taking more responsibility for?
- What areas could you take more responsibility for if you took small steps to improve?
- What steps can you take next?

Step 5: Look at the reality you're creating for yourself due to helplessness.

- How will continuing to play the victim, giving your power away to others, and remaining depending on others negatively impact your life if you continue it for another YEAR?
- 5 YEARS?
- 10 YEARS?

Step 6: Develop self-love.

- What do you really enjoy doing that relaxes you and makes you feel happy?
- When can you schedule 30 minutes a week for yourself to give yourself the gift of doing this activity?
- Where and how will you do this for yourself? Put it on your calendar or set a reminder NOW.

Step 7: Set one small goal.

- What is one small task you WANT to do that you normally only do if a) you first get advice from someone else or b) someone else helps you or does it for you?
- When is the next time you expect this task to happen again?
- What can you do to remind yourself to do it YOURSELF next time?
- If appropriate, can you tell the person who usually helps ahead of time about your plan and ask them not to help you?
- If you catch yourself trying to reach out to someone else to tell you what to do or do it for you, stop yourself and exhaust all options for doing it by yourself.

Step 8: Celebrate your progress.

Every time you do ANYTHING for yourself that you normally would not have, celebrate your progress. Smile at yourself in the mirror. Tell yourself you did a good job. Reward yourself by doing something you enjoy. Dance. Do anything that makes you feel good about it.

Remember, YOU CAN FEEL INSECURE AND STILL TAKE ACTION.