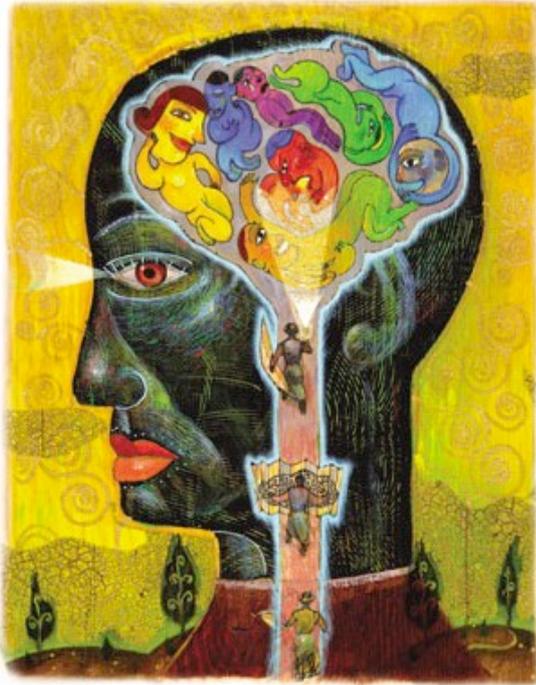


www.CBTandFeelingGood.com - A CBT look at the perils of negative visualisation and the benefit of living in the present...



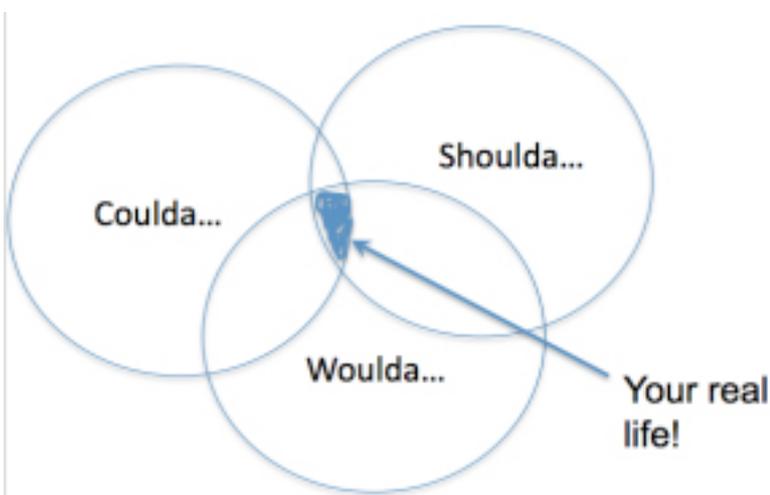
Alternative title:

'HOW TO STOP UPSETTING YOURSELF BY GOING OVER THINGS ENDLESSLY IN YOUR HEAD'

Many of us have busy buzzing heads, constantly visualising past and future events. Sacrificing the here and now by constructing and starring in painful movies in our heads. This is yet another of those primal

'supposed to be helping us to process and problem solve or get closure' tools, which, when it becomes an overused seductive negative habit, messes us up by needlessly kickstarting our stress hormones and upsetting us. It can lower mood, undermine confidence, and cause self defeating behaviour. **And of course it robs us of living in the moment, of living our real life as it is.**

Have a read, have a think - if you see yourself, make some changes...



Visualizing a painful past

event: we remember the event in living colour, re-running it over and over in our minds as we attempt to process it - changing the dialogue to what we wish we'd said or done: 'I'll say this,

then she'll say that, then this will happen..' , adding new scenes to the movie that will change the outcome, shifting and shaping dialogue so that the other party can finally see things from our point of view... This process has the effect of sending our body into a simmering fight or flight with stress hormones, almost as if we were there and responding to the real event.

Visualising a feared future event: When we have anxiety or depression we are often fearful, prompting us to imagine / visualise the scene, what we'll say, what will happen... Again, we make a movie in our heads, we see it and feel it, there is ever changing dialogue - **you are your own little Steven Spielberg**. Poor emotional health generally imposes a negative gloomy filter on events, so you may devise scenes that are unpleasant - which sends you into fight or flight, though ironically this process is meant to help you, preparing you, allowing you to problem solve in advance, saving you from surprise hurts and shocks, and so on. But, in reality, it does the opposite and is an irrational fortune telling habit, that will freak you out and may cause self sabotaging behaviour (from being uncomfortable and anxious and 'odd' at the event, to avoiding the event altogether...). Note: most of the things we worry about never happen.



Visualising a fantasy future: anxiety and depression bring avoidance behaviour, where we hide away and protect ourselves from discomfort - this gives us the time and motive to do a lot of imagining of a nicer world for ourselves, making movies in our heads of a different 'us', in all sorts of situations.

Again, this process can be useful, for motivation and planning and optimism, but alas, with anxiety and depression it can become a seductive time sucker that goes nowhere - and the scripts often contains enemies that we triumph over, or that we give out to, in an attempt to persuade them of their utter wrongness and our

victimhood - the effect being to send us on an emotional rollercoaster. Not good for your physical or emotional health, or living your actual one and only life.

Whatever the scenario, when we have low self esteem accompanied by anxiety or depression, we will often lean towards giving these imaginings negative outcomes for ourselves, even though we are the author and director! Of course then we have to start all over again. And even when we give it what we would consider a positive outcome for us, corrosive upsettiness at what we view as the bad behaviour of others, or the unfairness of the world, or our own 'rubbishness', activates our stress hormones and messes us up anyway.



So – what to do?

We can learn to build awareness of how and when we use visualisation, and whether it has become a harmful habit, and we can develop skills and strategies to stop it. To do this, we *learn the science of thinking and feeling and behaviour* with CBT:



Today's leading psychotherapy is Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), which teaches us to examine and alter our thinking and behaviour when we have developed bad habits, and when it's irrational and self sabotaging.

It's clear there's nothing but pain to be gained by excessive negative visualisation, right? So CBT strategies like 'thought stopping', and alternative view thinking, and immediate behaviour change, help to curb this habit - over and over, until it's neutralised. CBT is a psycho-educational model, so you can learn the theory and self help components yourself – perhaps starting with this blog as a

resource! (Of course, the main aim will be to fix the self esteem issue and to tackle negative thinking in all areas).

Learn to harness the power of visualisation for good: It stands to reason that if visualisation is so powerful in a negative way, it can also be used in a positive way – deliberate visualisation of past happy events also have the power to make us feel as we did when the event was occurring, and deliberate positive visualisation of a future event can calm us and give us confidence.



Here – test it out:

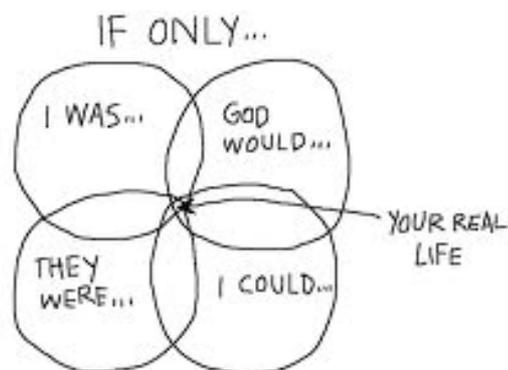
- **First:** close your eyes and visualise a past unhappy event, where you were very emotionally upset, when you were not happy with the way you were thinking and feeling and behaving... Use all your senses. See it, hear it, feel it. Remember the dialogue. Afterwards, consider how this makes you feel.
- **Next:** close your eyes and visualize a past happy occasion, one where you were *delighted* with yourself – when you were feeling fantastic, thinking confidently and positively, and were proud of how you acted, and of people's response to you (perhaps a work achievement, or admiration of friends, or a romantic encounter... whatever). See it, hear it, feel it. Remember the dialogue. Afterwards, consider how this makes you feel.
- **Do you see the difference?** So is it rational to do something that makes us feel bad? You have choice. You can build awareness of how and when you use visualization, and you can nip it in the bud when it's the painful negative variety, choosing consciously and deliberately to think about something else and to do something else right then and there. Over and over, until you lose

the old habit. And you can *learn to visualize happy positive scenes that will make you feel good on demand* (no, really).

Note: visualisation doesn't have to be an actual event that has happened or that will happen, it can be an imagined event, for relaxation and affirmations. It's proven to work. Give it a go.

Choose to LIVE IN THE PRESENT instead of the past or future.

When you find yourself worrying about the future, or excessively thinking about the past, remind yourself that *neither exist right now*. The past is gone, it's done. The future is not here yet - and you can't fortune tell, whatever you're visualising hasn't happened yet, and might never happen. If we wish away our todays for yesterday or tomorrow, then we never properly *have* a 'today'.



Choosing **Acceptance and Living in the Present**, accepting life as it is right now, not as it 'should' have been, will calm and centre you. If you want to change your life, the only place to do it is in the present. Aim to accept and learn from the past, then let it go and move on positively.

Learn to view the future with curiosity and excitement. Deliberately choose to stop and think of what the present is, right here right now, and get on with the business of living your real actual life.

"The secret of health for both mind and body is not to mourn for the past, worry about the future, or anticipate troubles - but to **live in the present** moment wisely and earnestly."

~~ **Buddha**



"But man postpones or remembers; he does not **live in the present**, but with reverted eye laments the past, or, heedless of the riches that surround him, stands on tiptoe to foresee the future. He cannot be happy and strong until he too lives with nature **in the present**, above time." ~~ **Ralph Waldo Emerson**

"The **present** is never our goal, the past and **present** are our means, the future alone is our goal. Thus we never live but we hope to live, and always hoping to be happy, it is inevitable that we will never be so." ~~ **Blaise Pascal**

Use my free online self help resource blog at iVeronicaWalsh.wordpress.com to access theory posts and downloadable worksheets to begin your guided self help journey in learning how to be happy

And check out my www.CBTandFeelingGood.com website for in real life cognitive behavioural training, either in Ireland, or via SKYPE.

Okay, good luck, and have fun. Regards, *Veronica Walsh*