

RECOVERY SESSION:

SELF-SABOTAGE



DISCLAIMER

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WHAT IS SELF-SABOTAGE? AND WHY DO WE DO IT?

"Human beings are creatures of habit, we find safety in routine and generally do not cope well with uncertainty"
- Emily Cooke

Typically, routines are great! Routines provide a way for people to organize their lives, manage their decision-making and expectations, and reduce stress and anxiety related to uncertainty.

But, there can be downsides to too much routine, especially when it constricts people to rigid patterns of thinking and behaving. Due to the sense of control and certainty that routines can provide, people may feel a psychological force to continue utilizing certain thinking and behavioural patterns - even if these patterns are actually maladaptive for their health!

This is why people self-sabotage - we become accustomed to acting in ways that make us feel an immediate sense of security and comfort, even if it could lead to long-term ramifications for our jobs, relationships, sense of self, and overall health.

Self-sabotage is prone to occur when we let our inner critic and maladaptive coping tools take the wheel and direct our routines. In order to stop a cycle of self-sabotage, especially when trying to recover from an eating disorder or disordered eating, it is important to bring more conscious awareness to these constructs since they often occur automatically and unconsciously.

Sound confusing? Do not worry! This handout will go more in-depth into self-sabotage, its drivers, and what you can do about them.



Image Link: <https://www.notsalmon.com/2012/10/17/why-people-self-sabotage-their-happiness/>

Chater, N. (2018, August 16). Why most people follow routines. The Conversation. Retrieved from, <https://theconversation.com/why-most-people-follow-routines-101630>

Hoegh, J. B. (2021, May 28). The importance of maintaining a stable routine during stressful times-f07c7c93c19f. Retrieved from, <https://jasmin1002.medium.com/the-importance-of-maintaining-a-stable-routine-during-stressful-times-f07c7c93c19f>

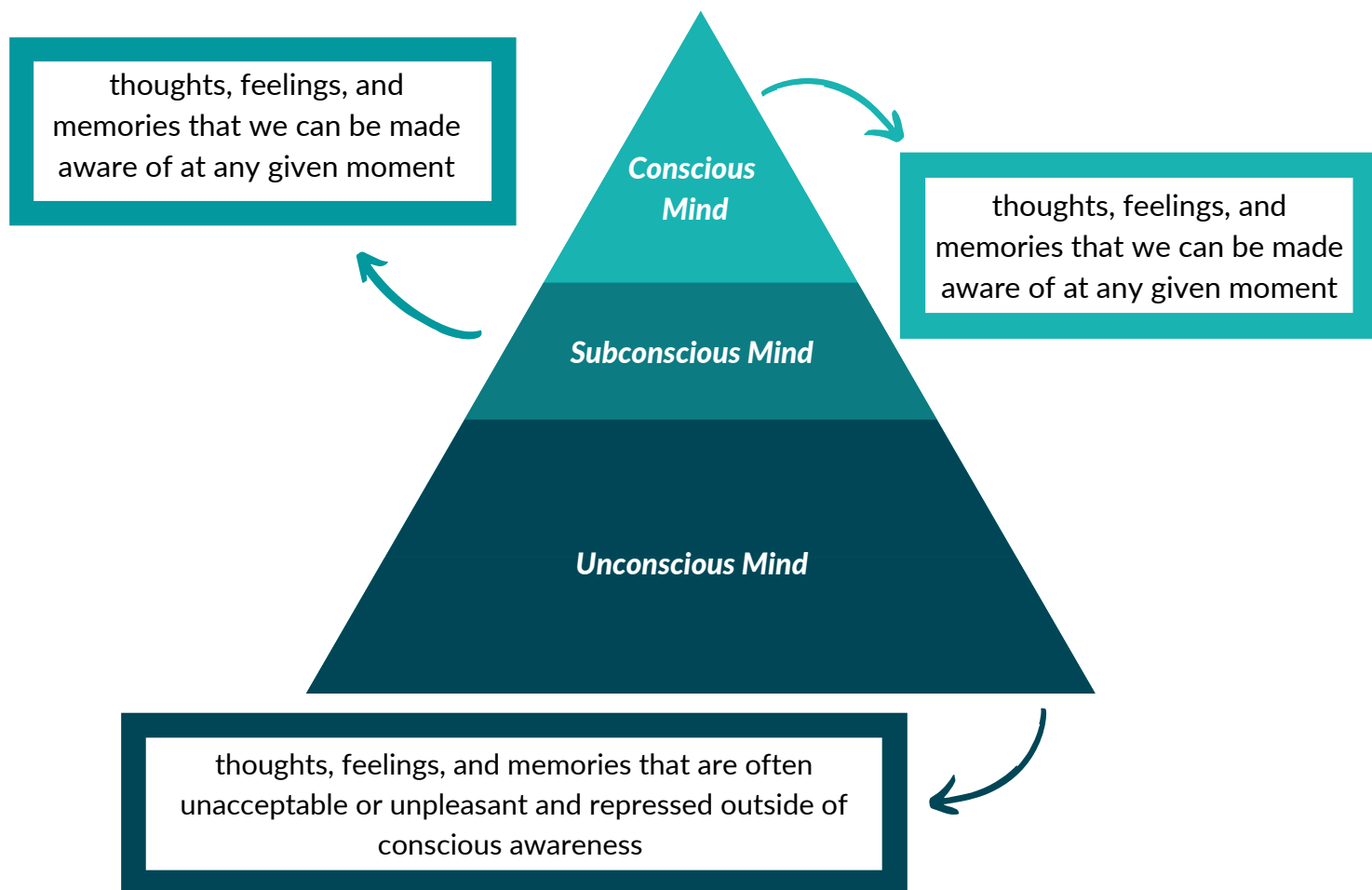
Simpson, S., & Smith, E. (2019). Schema therapy for eating disorders: Theory and practice for individual and group settings. Routledge.

THE UNSETTLED MIND

Many psychologists explain human behaviour and thought using interactions of three states of consciousness: the subconscious, conscious, and unconscious.

Someone may be consciously aware that they want to recover, seek help, and address their eating disorder; however, unconscious fears, shame, and/or guilt can creep into the subconscious, and lead to sabotage long-term goals for the sake of an immediate sense of security and certainty.

Inner critics and coping modes subside in the subconscious mind, readily available for whenever we are in a state of distress.



Often, it is our inner critics and our maladaptive coping modes that can cause us to sabotage recovery, relationships, happiness, and goals.

THE UNSETTLED MIND: THE INNER CRITIC & COPING MODES

"People will never rise above the opinion of themselves"
- Peter Sage

These subconscious constructs have been mentioned a few times, so it is about time this handout defined them:

Inner Critic

The inner voice that is self-critical in nature. Often times, one will think that their inner critic is needed to achieve their ideal self, maintain motivation, or maintain morality; however, often times the inner critic is why needs are left unmet, intense feelings of shame are experienced, and why patterns of self-sabotage arise.

★ **The Demanding Critic...**

Tells you that your work, duties, and responsibilities to others hold more importance over your health and happiness; it tells you that activities such as rest, nourishment and self-care are unproductive and makes you perceive them as such.

★ **The Punitive Critic...**

Tells you that you do not deserve to recover or be happy; it wants to punish and hurt you for having feelings and needs; it may make you hold the core belief that you are internally flawed, worthless, or unlovable.

★ **The Guilt-Inducing Critic...**

Tells you that you are at fault for not meeting your own needs and that you have no right to feel sad or angry; it tells you you should feel selfish for putting your own needs above others and that to self-care is to self-indulge.

THE UNSETTLED MIND: THE INNER CRITIC & COPING MODES

Maladaptive Coping Modes

Could also be described as the defences against the unconscious mind. To avoid hearing the inner critic, to avoid experiencing unpleasant or unwanted physical sensations, and to avoid re-triggering unpleasant memories, coping modes are formed. Coping is typically great for recovery, but some coping modes can work to sabotage it. Below offers an inclusive - not exhaustive - list of maladaptive coping modes.

★ ***The Surrender Coping Mode***

A mode of coping whereby you surrender to the instruction or torment of inner critic and allow yourself to feel not good enough, shameful, guilty, or unhappy. In recovery, this coping mode may cause one to feel helpless, and that others hold the hidden solution on how to "fix" them.

★ ***The Avoidant Coping Mode***

A mode of coping whereby you avoid situations which may be displeasurable or bring on unwanted memories to protect yourself. In recovery, this coping mode may cause one sabotage recovery in an attempt to avoid addressing the difficult feelings associated with working through the journey of recovery.

★ ***The Overcompensation Coping Mode***

A mode of coping whereby you cope with the inner critic, unpleasant situations, or unpleasant memories by acting in excess or by overcompensating for the instructions of the inner critic. For example, one may enforce rules on themselves and over-manage their body mass and food intake; or, one's inner critic may make them feel weak and, in response, cause them to act more aggressive or dominant. In recovery, this coping mode may lead one to believe that recovery should be quick and efficient. This mode could sabotage recovery when the client chooses to prioritize completing the work in recovery (i.e., for the care provider) instead of focusing on their own true needs and concerns.

★ Time to Reflect:

Do any of these inner critics resonate with you?

Consider how you have critiqued yourself in the past; have your thoughts made you feel unworthy (likely demanding critic), shameful (likely punitive critic), or guilty (likely guilt-inducing critic)?

Many people report multiple inner critics, but one or two tend to be most powerful. Addressing your inner critic can be the first step towards defeating self-sabotaging patterns.

Consider how you have dealt with difficult situations in the past; do any of these coping modes resonate with you?

Addressing maladaptive coping modes is important for defeating self-sabotaging patterns.

SELF-SABOTAGE IN-ACTION

The consequences of listening and giving into the inner critic and maladaptive coping modes can be represented by poor thinking and behavioural patterns which can distort reality and threaten recovery. Take a chance to reflect on if or how these patterns show up for you.

Examples of Maladaptive Thinking Patterns:

ALL OR NOTHING THINKING

Sometimes called 'black and white thinking'

Sounds like:

- *If I'm not perfect I have failed*
- *Either I do it right or not at all*

OVERGENERALIZING

Seeing a pattern based upon a single event, or being overly broad in the conclusions we draw.

Sounds like:

- *Everything is always terrible*
- *Nothing good ever happens*

MENTAL FILTER

Only paying attention to certain types of advice.

Sounds like:

- Noticing our failures but not seeing our successes

DISQUALIFYING THE POSITIVE

Discounting the good things that have happened or that you have done for some reason or another

Sounds like:

- *That doesn't count*

JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS

There are two key types of jumping to conclusions:

- Mind reading: imagining we know what other are thinking
- Fortune telling: predicting the future

MAGNIFICATION & MINIMISATION

Blowing things out of proportion (catastrophising), or inappropriately shrinking something to make it seem less important

EMOTIONAL REASONING

Assuming that because we feel a certain way what we think must be true.

Sounds like:

- *I feel embarrassed so I must be an idiot.*

SHOULD-MUST

Using critical words like 'should', 'must', or 'ought' can make us feel guilty, or like we have already failed.

If we apply 'shoulds' to other people the result is often frustration.

LABELLING

Assigning labels to ourselves or other people.

Sounds like:

- *I'm a loser*
- *I'm completely useless*
- *They're such an idiot*

PERSONALISATION

Blaming yourself or taking responsibility for something that wasn't completely your fault. Conversely, blaming other people for something that was your fault.

SELF-SABOTAGE IN-ACTION

The consequences of listening and giving into the inner critic and maladaptive coping modes can be represented by poor thinking and behavioural patterns which can distort reality and threaten recovery:

Examples of Self-Sabotaging Behaviours:

- Increased body checking and over exercising,
- Restricting meals, snacks, or foods previously enjoyed,
- Increased need for control and perfection,
- Hopelessness and defeated composure,
- Only wearing loose-fitted clothes,
- Avoiding situations with food or mirrors,
- Social isolation,
- Telling others you are doing better and/or improving more than you are, and
- Striving for an "ideal" self instead of accepting your (unique) true self.



★Time to Reflection:

Do any of these behaviours resonate with you? List them here:

Image Link: <https://www.michigandaily.com/statement/when-fun-house-isnt-fun-anymore/>

BC Mental Health & Substance Use Services. (2022). From Survive to Thrive: A Resource for Recovering from an Eating Disorder, written by those with lived experience. Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre.

DISENGAGING WITH SELF-SABOTAGE

So, now you know about the inner critic and maladaptive coping strategies. In other words, now you know what can cause you to self-sabotage; however, what you would probably like to know is how to **stop** self-sabotaging. To be put gently, it can be difficult at first to stop (remember the tidbit on how much we love routines?), but with this handout you can surpass the most challenging step to ending your sabotaging habits. Below outlines some useful steps for disengaging with self-sabotage:

1) Acknowledgement

The first step, and most challenging for some, towards ending self-sabotage begins with acknowledging your maladaptive thought patterns and behaviours. This handout kept in mind how difficult it can be to see some of our habits that may help us short-term, but affect us negatively long-term. Acknowledging your inner critic, your maladaptive coping modes, and your maladaptive habits is the first and most difficult step towards disengaging with self-sabotage. The previous contents of this handout should guide and make it easier for you tackle this first step.

2) Challenge the Inner Critic

After acknowledging your inner critic, it becomes easier to discern when it is speaking to you:

- Take the opportunity to challenge its instructions and critiques.

Inner Critic: "You're so _____, you do not deserve to eat today"

Challenge: "Regardless of how I look I feel it is important for my health to eat everyday and nourish my body."

- When your inner critic is speaking, stop listening to its critiques and start considering how to nurture your vulnerable side (e.g., stop and think, what is a need that I have unmet which could be fulfilled right now?).

3) Learn New Coping Strategies

Again, with our attraction of routines, it can be hard to drop the ways we have adjusted to cope with our inner critic and distressing concerns. It is easier to replace maladaptive coping strategies with healthy strategies, rather than try to stop coping all together in an attempt to stop self-sabotaging. Below offers a few healthy methods that can be used to cope:

- Ask for social support when dealing with distressing situations,
- Do not let yourself ruminate, attempt to engage in problem-solving, and
 - Example: find ways to reduce the sources of stress of your life and/or increase access to activities that fulfill needs or induce healthy development
- Challenge the inner critic (step 2) and previously held beliefs.

4) Maintenance Tips

Similar to step 3, these maintenance tips will help you maintain the goal to disengage from self-sabotage while in recovery:

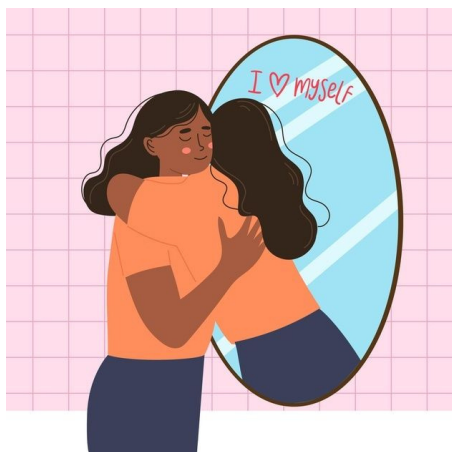
Begin to Shift Your Belief System

Acknowledging and working to step away from diet culture and the need to attain an "ideal" body. One alternative that you could explore instead is weight neutrality:

1 A person's health status, risk level, or quality of life cannot be assumed based solely on a number on a scale.	2 Weight is determined by a complex set of genetic, cultural, social, and behavioural determinants, many of which individuals cannot change.	3 Bodies have always come in a variety of shapes and sizes - and it is unreasonable to expect otherwise.	4 Individuals of all sizes can benefit from support in their thoughts, feelings, and decisions, which ultimately lead to improved well-being, regardless of weight.
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Learn to Forgive Yourself

It can be a challenge not to give into inner critic's demands or to resist using maladaptive coping modes. The key is to stick with the steps towards disengaging with self-sabotage, not to expect to be perfect. When you do find yourself practicing thinking or behaviours that you believe may sabotage recovery, do not give up! This does not mean you have failed, it just means you are human. Learn to forgive yourself, determine what you can do in future similar circumstances in a healthier way, then keep on fighting because you deserve a healthier, happier life.



Practice Routine Self-Care

Self-care is an important activity needed to foster self-love:

- Find activities that are relaxing/de-stressing,
- Make sure to eat and drink every day,
- Try to exercise or have moderate movement daily,
- Maintain a sleep schedule,
- Connect with people who make you happy or feel comfortable,
- Set goals for the future and acknowledge the accomplishments you have made.

5) Tyłka, T., et al. (2014.) The weight-inclusive versus weight-normative approach to health: Evaluating the evidence for prioritizing well-being over weight loss. Journal of Obesity. doi:10.1155/2014/983495.

Image Link: https://www.freepik.com/free-vector/high-self-esteem-with-woman-mirror_10882719.htm

AFFIRMATIONS

Things to Remember:

*You are uniquely you, so you are not comparable to others; it is your
qualities that make you wonderful
People strive for originality, but you can not attain that if you are
striving to look like someone else
Happiness should not be equated to a subjective view of beauty;
happiness should be connected to more important things (e.g.,
friends, family, experiences)*

Responses for the Inner Critic

"I have control over my life, not my inner critic"

"It is normal and human to cope in a maladaptive way sometimes, what is important is forgiving myself for those times and sticking to my efforts in disengaging from self-sabotage"

"My health is important to me and to value it means to challenge and/or ignore my inner critic"

"I deserve to recover and am willing to work on myself to address my concerns"

"I may feel ambivalent to treatment, but I will take the steps needed to recover because my health is important"

"It is difficult to love myself, but I will take the time to practice self-care so I can start to appreciate myself more"

Motivational Messages

"One bad day does not need to equate a bad week, you can make the change you desire"

"Compliments are great; you do not need to receive them to get them - give them to yourself"

"There are recovery stories out there which means it is possible; make yours the next"

"You are *always* stronger than your inner critic makes you believe you are"

"One day, you are going to look back and think - 'I am a fighter!' "

"Progress is the objective, not perfection; reward yourself for your achievements along your journey"

"Think of your body, not as a beautiful vase, but as a machine to maintain and look after" - Unknown

FURTHER LEARNING

It is highly encouraged to pursue this additional material. They can be completed in the order given, or explored by interest:

YouTube Videos

[Why We Worry All the Time and How to Cope](#)

[Overcoming the Inner Critic](#)

[On Feeling Stuck](#)

[Learning to Forgive Ourselves](#)

Podcasts

[Stop Sabotaging Yourself with Dr. Judy Ho](#)

[Managing Your Inner Critic with Dr. Rick Hanson](#)

[How to Cope with Failure and Deal with Disappointment with Dr. Rick Hanson](#)

TED Talks

[Learning to See More and Be More - Lindsay Kite](#)

[Know Your Inner Saboteurs - Shirzad Chamine](#)

[The Power of the Unconscious and How to Eliminate Self-Doubt - Peter Sage](#)

Reading

[Resource for Recovering from an Eating Disorder from those with Lived Experience](#)

[Challenging the Inner Critic](#)

[Scientific Analysis of a Single Client Case: Coping Modes and Anorexia Nervosa](#)