

When You Can't Stop Overthinking

Questions you can use when thinking will not land — not a way to make it stop on command

When thinking will not land — looping options, replaying what you should have said, stacking one more round — it can feel like the only move is to think harder. This handout gives you questions you can use with that loop. It is not a way to make overthinking stop on command. A loop that will not close tends to respond when we approach it with curiosity, instead of trying to shut it down.

How to use this

- 1. Ground first — then notice.** Before any questions: look around the room, name a few things you can see, and feel both feet on the floor. Keep your eyes open if closing them makes you lose the room. Then notice the thinking that will not land — a loop that will not close, replaying what you should have said, stacking options, a tightness that thinking is supposed to fix.
- 2. Check how you feel toward it.** If you notice anger, fear, or “I just want this gone,” that’s another part of you reacting. Gently ask that part if it would be willing to step back for a few minutes so you can listen. If what you notice instead is agreement — “this is just how I am” or “I just need to think it through” — that is the loop speaking in your own voice; see if you can find even a little space between you and it. And if something in you doesn’t want to step back, don’t force it. Get curious about that instead, or simply stop for today — either way, you haven’t done it wrong.
- 3. Ask one question inward, then wait.** Answers don’t always come in words. They can arrive as images, memories, feelings, or body sensations. Don’t force or invent an answer — whatever comes, including nothing, is useful.
- 4. Thank it** for whatever it shows you, even if it stays quiet.
- 5. Know when to stop.** If at any point this feels like too much, stop. Look around the room, name a few things you can see, and feel your feet on the floor. Stopping early is doing it right — we can always continue together in session. If you are left in a dark place, call or text 9-8-8, the Suicide Crisis Helpline, anywhere in Canada (the same number also works in the US). In an emergency, call 911. Kids Help Phone (for young people): 1-800-668-6868 or text CONNECT to 686868.

You don’t need to use every question — pick the ones that draw you in. If a memory of harm starts to open, stop and bring it to session; do not explore it alone. This is not homework to force the thinking to stop, stay up with a loop, or explore old harm alone. Keep your eyes open if closing them makes you lose the room. If the loop turns toward harm, stop and bring it to session.

Getting acquainted

- Where do I notice you — in my body, behind my eyes, or somewhere around me?
- When you will not land, what do you look like — a loop, a replay, stacking options?
- Is there a tightness you are trying to fix by thinking, or a voice that says just one more round?
- When do you get loudest — at night, after I leave a room, before something I cannot take back?
- How long have you been trying to think me to safety this way?

Understanding its job

- What are you trying to keep from happening by thinking this through once more?
- What are you afraid would happen if I let this loop rest for tonight, in a room that is safe enough?
- What have you been carrying that I might not have seen?
- What would help you feel a little safer, right here?

Its history

If a memory of harm, fear, or something you have never told anyone starts to open, stop. Bring it to session — do not explore it alone. This is not homework to force the thinking to stop, stay up with a loop, or explore old harm alone — if the loop turns toward harm, stop and bring it to session.

- When did you first start looping this way? What was happening in my life back then?
- What did you need then that you didn't get?
- What was that time like for you?

Letting it know you heard it

If anything it has shown you makes sense — even a little — tell it so. Something as simple as: *“I can see you’ve been thinking this through so I wouldn’t make a mistake, be surprised, or be caught unprepared. Thank you for showing me.”* You don’t have to become less-thoughtful on command to appreciate its effort. This step matters more than any question on this page. A loop like this eases from being understood, not from being argued with.

Its hopes and needs

- Do you know I’m here, listening? How is it for you to have me pay attention to you this way?
- What do you need from me — not someday, but this week, in a way I can actually keep?
- What would help you trust that I won’t force the thinking to stop when looping still feels like safety?
- Is there anything you’ve been wanting me to know for a long time?

Building a different relationship

Only try these if, during this conversation, the loop has felt noticeably softer toward you. If it hasn’t, staying curious is the whole practice — that’s a full success, not a failure.

- Would you like to see what my life is like now — that some rooms are safer than they were then?
- Would you be willing to let me stay with you this week when the pull to think it through once more comes?
- Would you be willing, someday, to let me get to know more of what you’ve been holding? *(This last one is just a question to ask — not something to explore on your own. If yes, or if it is holding old harm, bring that to session.)*
- And when you finish: “I need to stop for now — is there anything you want me to remember? I’ll come back and check on you.” *(Then do — even a brief hello later in the week counts.)*

If it asks you for something, keep your side of it only if it is small, kind, and possible — and do not agree to go into old memories alone, or to force the thinking to stop, stay up with a loop, or explore old harm alone. If the loop turns toward harm, stop and bring it to session. A loop that is promised the world and then forgotten will have a point.

Afterwards

Jot down whatever you noticed — words, images, memories, surprises, or the fact that nothing came. There’s nothing to get right. If you’d like, bring your notes to our next session. And if you never got around to this before we meet, that’s completely fine too.

Good to remember

Thinking that will not land is not trying to keep you from ever resting. It is almost always still doing a job that once kept a mistake, a surprise, or being caught unprepared from landing as danger — looping, for a safer room, and a you who can stay. The goal is not to become less-thoughtful on command; it is to build a relationship where this loop no longer has to think you to safety alone. If this practice leaves you in a dark place, call or text 9-8-8, the Suicide Crisis Helpline, anywhere in Canada (the same number also works in the US). In an emergency, call 911. Kids Help Phone (for young people): call 1-800-668-6868 or text CONNECT to 686868.