

How to Purposefully Forget Things:

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There are many different reasons why we wish to forget things, be it that the memories make us sad, embarrassed, angry or just uneasy. However, it is something of a skill to purposefully forget things as the obvious solution (choosing to forget) is in fact part of the problem (it's hard, if not virtually impossible to "just forget"). Here's how to explore what causes us to remember and ways in which you might be able to consciously choose to forget.

Steps

1. **Aim to understand why you remember the issue by investigating what is going on.** It really is mostly because you aren't finished with it yet, meaning you aren't prepared to let the past be past. There may also be secondary issues, such as you want to do something about the event, such as undo whatever has occurred, repair it or simply forget it – and therein lies the problem. Each of these causes for remembering actually reinforce the need to remember.
2. **Consider how you remember.** Do the thoughts just happen, or do they happen in response to a stimulus, such as seeing, hearing, feeling or smelling something connected to the event? The triggers for memory can be quite subtle and sometimes catch us completely unaware.
 - Photographs & albums are a basic stimulus. You may want to remember something in particular, but seeing other images in these pages can prompt you to remember something else. It doesn't always happen at once, as its building up to when it would have a bigger influence - very much like the snowball effect.

It's very important to find out what is causing you to remember the particular event you're seeking to forget. Sometimes a feeling will prompt that memory to make new feelings. It's very much like a groove we just go into, and like a linked chain or a line of dominoes all linked together, it all simply "falls into place" and the memory asserts itself.

3. **Find out if it is possible to remove the stimulus.** If you wish to forget a sad event, yet have symbols and images related to event constantly surrounding you, it will be virtually impossible to forget. In this case, you'll need to put away those "trigger objects" or symbols that confront you. Perhaps you need to go so far as to redecorate or even move from where you are to make a fresh start. There is a good grain of practical wisdom to the old quote "out of sight, out of mind".
4. **Find out what is compelling you to want to forget something.** Is it just that you want to destroy the memory only or are you actually wishing to destroy the event itself? Do you want to remember something differently in order to venerate or respect someone, or something? Do you want justice or vengeance for your pains? Are you addicted to the memory?
 - In order to want to do something, you have to have and retain the object of that wanting. It literally means that the "wanting" feelings and the "object" (being the

memory) require and support each other. They cannot exist on their own. It is also directly proportionate to the amount of attachment or addiction you have to the thought, or alternatively the amount of rejection, fear or hatred you have towards that memory to the amount of strength the memory will have to assert itself in your mind. If you fight it, you are merely giving it more power to dominate you.

5. **Use that knowledge to understand the context of the memory.** In order to forget it, you must be prepared to let it go. The way to do it always depends on the context. There are many different ways of doing this and they are often interchangeable so it is best to understand this is merely a method, or a practice you can use whenever you so wish.
 - How many times would you watch a movie before you have had enough of it?

If you feel obliged to remember something, but wish to forget it, then evaluate the benefit of the continued review of that memory. Possibly you feel obligated because you're still obeying someone else's expectations or interpretations on how to think rather than your own.

- If it is about a tragedy in your family or friends, can you love them enough to forgive and move on?
- If you have an embarrassing or a regret based memory, are you prepared to learn from it, to satisfy your mind that you will be mindful not to repeat that mistake? Constantly punishing yourself for something wrong in the past prevents you from growing or letting go of the memory that generates your internal shame.
- Perhaps you miss someone or something, be it a happier time or place. Sometimes these memories are a way that the mind uses to tell you to move on and improve your life, or that you personally are denying whatever stress, unhappiness or uncertainty is happening now so that you have to come to terms with that first. The mind so often uses memories and thoughts as a warning, a distraction or a pacifier, but these thought chains can easily become overpowered with more stressful thoughts and desires. In this case, ask yourself if by avoiding doing the hard work now are you simply creating more problems in the present and the future?
- If it is something that is causing you to strive for justice or revenge, are you prepared to move on and no longer let the past poison your life? The story of Romeo and Juliet is filled with examples of the terrible results of maintaining an ongoing vendetta – none could forgive and forget until it was too late. Too many people have lived through hardships, but have allowed these hardships to destroy any happiness they have now and in future as the abuses they have endured are used by them to make up their identity. The greater tragedy is that these cases may deny others freedom and happiness as they cannot allow themselves personally to be free of their own demons. Without their ideas and unhappy memories, they have so little left to identify with. It has become "familiar" and by that their unhappiness is giving their life substance, even if it is destructive, while fear of the unfamiliar prevents them from letting go.
- Perhaps you remember because you are the last one left who does remember. Holding on to such memories only reinforces loneliness and unhappiness as rarely are people so lonely as when the only other person who remembers is gone. That

life is temporary is something you can use to let go of the past and start to build a better present and future.

6. **Commit, for the true solution often seems hard work and ongoing work.** Firstly, it requires you to accept the event happened, which is hard enough, then forgive it and yourself and let it go. Then continue to keep a gentle awareness so that when you are aware of the memory recurring you can let it go again, until it is habit and the memory becomes weaker until it fades away.
 - If necessary, do talk to someone. Be it a friend, counselor or a therapist. Hypnosis and meditation may help some cases as a way to train the mind, while different forms of psychotherapy can be very beneficial.
 - Similarly always ask yourself "How can I learn from this memory" or "How can I use this memory to improve my life?" in order to use the memory as a tool for the cases when your mind is trying to tell you something. Ask other people you respect for their advice and opinions, as so often they have experienced some oppression that memories have caused and gain insight from what they did to deal with them. So often once you have built from it, it no longer has relevance or importance.
 - While it does sound more and more like a cliché, by "living in the moment" gives you focus and awareness here and now, so memories are far less likely to occur and you can deal quickly with the ones that do.

There is a subtle gem of wisdom behind the old quote that in order to gain something, you must lose something. In this case, you must lose your desire to continue to struggle against, or lose your attachment of that memory. It may seem mindless repetition, but in order to gain freedom of it, you just have to let it go. Only you can set yourself free.

7. **Create a memorable gesture to replace the memory or develop means that you can use either personally or symbolically to let go.** This method is useful for the more stubborn memory addictions.
 - A good example is picturing or imagining the thing you want to forget as a snapshot Polaroid, and then imagining yourself setting that picture on fire. Focus on the edges turning brown and curling, before turning black and crumbling away, with the fire eating inwards until the picture is gone. It may sound like hokum, but it is a symbolic gesture that can help you to mentally move away from the memory, thinking of it as something that's been and gone, now its ashes blown away by the wind.
8. **Endeavour to stop wanting to have anything to do with the object or theme, if it is something that you cannot build anything from.** You can lose interest in it, become disenchanted with it, and/or remind yourself the benefit of letting go. This is the hard part as it's like removing a much loved toy from a child – the child is not going to enjoy it but eventually the child will become accustomed to putting their toys away. It's really the same thing, you must put your memories away by being prepared to put them away and move on. As this can take time, be patient and kind with yourself.