

How to Purposefully Forget Things:

Reviewed by [Jessica B. Casey](#) on July 23, 2015.

Some memories can be so painful that you just want to forget them. While it is not possible to erase memories from your mind, there are strategies that you can use to make a memory less prominent. You can also do things to change the way a memory makes you feel and to replace unpleasant memories with new pleasant ones. Keep in mind that it is not always possible to forget a memory, so you may want to consider talking to a therapist if unpleasant memories are interfering with your life.

METHOD 1: FORGETTING MEMORIES

1. Figure out what you would like to forget. Before you can forget a memory, you will need think about the details of that memory. Doing so might be hard, but it is necessary. Write out your answers to the following questions to figure out the details of the memory:

- what happened?
- who was involved?
- where and when did it happen?
- what else was going on?
- how did you feel?

2. Think about what bothers you the most about the memory. Your next step is to pinpoint the most upsetting parts of the memory. Getting to the root of what bothers you the most will help you figure out what you need to forget. Write these specific things down so that you can work on forgetting them.

- Keep in mind that you can't forget the existence of your ex-girlfriend or ex-boyfriend, but you can forget particular dates, events, or sense memories. For example, you might be able to forget the smell of a perfume, your first date, or something that your ex said to you.
- If you find yourself dwelling on traumatic experiences, list the people who harassed you, the specific locations that caused you grief, and other sensory details like the smell of the lunchroom, the locker room, or the gym.

3. Erase the memory with a ritual release. You can use the details that you have identified to perform a ritual release. A ritual release is a mental exercise that may help you to forget a memory.^[1] To do a ritual release, all you have to do is turn your memory into a mental snapshot and imagine that you are setting it on fire.

- In your mind, picture a part of the memory that you want to forget. Try to imagine this detail like a picture. Then, imagine that you are setting that picture on fire.^[2] Imagine the

edges of the photo turning brown and curling up, then turning black and crumbling away. Imagine the fire burning your mental memory picture until the picture is gone.

- You could also try using another image in place of the actual memory. For example, you could imagine your bully as a Honda Civic sinking into a pond or as a freight train slowly crashing into a wall.

4. Remove your "trigger objects." Certain objects or images may trigger a painful memory for you and make it harder to forget the memory.^[3] If you have any objects or pictures that trigger bad memories for you, then put them somewhere out of sight or consider getting rid of them.

- For example, you may want to get rid of anything that reminds you of your ex, including photographs and gifts your ex gave you.

5. Consider [hypnosis](#). You might also find that hypnosis can help you to forget unwanted memories. Hypnosis requires you to enter a relaxed state so that you will be more open to suggestions.^[4] Look for a professional hypnotist in your area if this is something that you would like to try.

- Keep in mind that not everyone can be hypnotized, so it might not work for you. For those who can be hypnotized, there is also the chance that the effects will only last a short time.^[5]

METHOD 2: REPLACING MEMORIES

1. Try thinking about unpleasant details while doing pleasant things. One way to overcome the bad feelings associated with a memory is to teach yourself to associate the unpleasant memory with good things.^[6] Your goal is to make these painful memories less painful through positive association.

- Do something that makes you happy while thinking about a bad memory. For example, you could reflect on the embarrassment you felt when you broke up with your partner while listening to soothing music. Or, take a comfortable bath with scented candles while thinking about a time that you lost your job.
- If positive association does not seem help, then you can try also listening to loud white noise to drown out painful memories. Consider surrounding yourself with radios all turned to static, or other white noise generators while meditating on the painful memories.

2. Make some new memories. Another great way that you can get rid of old memories is to get out and form some new ones. Even if you're not doing things related to the memory you'd like to forget, forming new memories will push the things you want to forget out of the way.^[7] Some things you can do to start forming new memories include:

- take up a [new hobby](#)
- read a new book
- watch a movie
- find a [new job](#)
- [make some new friends](#)

3. Find ways to improve on bad memories. You may be able to replace a memory that you want to forget by building new memories that are similar to the old one.^[8] Try to seek out ways to experience positive things that are similar to the memory that you want to forget. After a while, your mind will start crossing its pathways and the original memory won't be as strong.

- For example, if you want to forget a trip you took to San Francisco, consider making another trip to San Francisco or take a trip to somewhere near there. Visit Berkley, Oakland, or Palo Alto. During your trip, buy new t-shirts, take new beach photos, and check out new restaurants.
- If your ex's cologne is stuck in your mind, head to the fragrance counter. Smell every single kind of men's cologne you can, clogging your mind with new scents and different kinds of fragrance.
- Go on dates. If you are bothered by memories of an ex, maybe going on a date will help you to move on and make some new good memories.

4. Consider talking to a therapist. If you are unable to forget or overcome negative feelings because of a bad memory, then it might be a good idea to seek the help of a therapist. A therapist can help you to deal with your emotions regarding a memory so that you can move on with your life.

Sources and Citations:

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