

## **How to Purposefully Forget Things:**

### **REPRESSING MEMORIES:**

- 1. Isolate the memory you'd like to forget.** It might be something that causes you emotional pain, like the death of a loved one or a particular moment from your break-up, something that dwelling upon brings you grief. If so, you need to replace the memory with other sorts of stimuli, to effectively confuse your brain pathways and "forget" those memories.<sup>[1]</sup> Consider the following details of the memory:
  - The people involved
  - The setting of the memory
  - The sense details of the memory, sights, sounds, smells, taste, touch
  - The emotional feeling of the memory
- 2. Define the memory in terms of its stimuli.** Define the exactly things you'd like to forget, as specifically as possible.
  - You can't forget the existence of your ex-girlfriend, but you can forget particular dates, events, or sense memories. The smell of a particular perfume, or a television show she particularly liked might trigger your memory of her. Write these specific things down.
  - If you find yourself dwelling upon traumatic middle school experiences, list the people who antagonized you by name, the specific locations that caused you grief, and other sense details--the smell of the lunchroom, the locker room, or the gym.
- 3. Meditate on these particular details while doing pleasant things.** Introduce pleasing stimuli while thinking actively about a bully from your school days, or the embarrassment you felt when you broke up with your partner by listening to soothing music, or taking a comfortable bath with scented candles, or by drinking mimosas on the porch in the summertime.
  - Your goal is to take the teeth out of those painful memories. Just as you might never want to eat pumpkin pie again if your parents broke up on Thanksgiving, you'll have trouble remembering things as being painful if you train yourself to associate those memories with things you find relaxing, pleasant, and enjoyable.
  - Alternatively, some suggest listening to white noise at extreme volumes, to drown out the memories, instead of associating them with pleasant stimuli. Consider surrounding yourself with radios all turned to static, or other white noise generators while meditating on the painful memories.

4. **Erase the memory.** In your mind, picture a memorable gesture to "destroy" the memory. Maybe picture the thing you want to forget as a snapshot Polaroid, and imagining yourself setting that picture on fire.<sup>[2]</sup> Focus on all the details: 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, burned up.
  - Try picturing something of significance to the memory. Imagine your bully as a Honda Civic sinking into a pond, or a freight train slowly crashing into a gulch.
5. **Consider hypnosis.** You're essentially hypnotizing yourself by messing with your memory pathways, introducing pleasant stimuli into the "room" of the memory that you want to forget. Think of it as lighting a good-smelling candle in the kitchen after you've burned popcorn. If you believe in the power of hypnosis, you might consider turning this task over to a professional.

## REPLACING MEMORIES:

1. **Get busy.** The quickest and smartest way to get rid of old memories is to actively form new ones. Even if you're not doing things directly related in any way to the memory you'd like to forget, the formation of new memories will push the undesirable things out of the way.<sup>[3]</sup>
  - Develop a new hobby
  - Read lots of new books and see lots of new movies
  - Look for a new job
  - Consider moving to a new apartment or house
2. **Remove the "trigger objects."** Put away those objects and symbols that force you to confront the memory you wish to forget. You may need to go so far as to redecorate or even move from where you are to make a fresh start.
  - Toss all your ex's old belongings, including photographs, clothing, and even furniture. Get rid of gifts they gave you. Even if you associate it "positively," it might be cross-wired in your brain with the bad things as well, the things you're trying to forget.
3. **Fill your mind with similar stimuli.** Find the "ballpark" that your memory plays in, and go to multiple games in that park. In other words, build new memories that are similar to the memory you want to forget. Your mind will start crossing its pathways, and you won't be able to remember the original trip as distinctly, because it will have to compete with the new, similar ones. For example:

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- If you want to forget a trip you took to San Francisco, consider making more trips in a similar way. Visit San Jose, Oakland, Palo Alto, Los Angeles, and Santa Cruz, and buy new t-shirts, take new beach photos, and check out new restaurants in those cities to muddle your memories of SF.
- 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 senses and different kinds of fragrance.
- Go on dates. It can be extremely helpful to build new memories with new people as a way of forgetting the old ones.