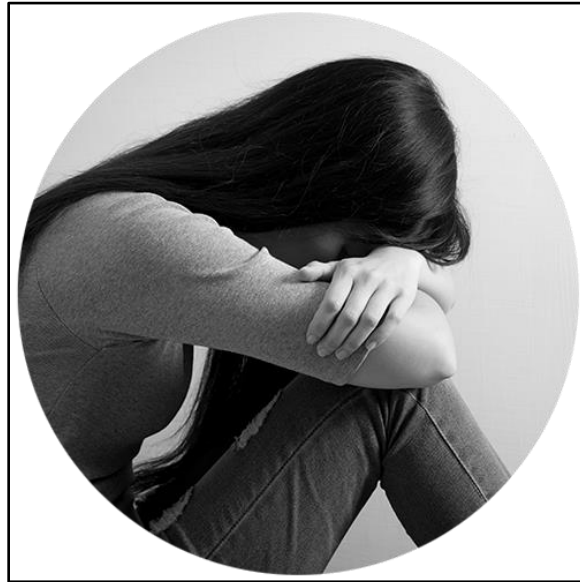


# **How to Overcome Emotional and Mental Blocks in Order to be Successful**



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Mental and Emotional blocks. A dreadful state. A state that can be described as perpetual stuckness. Everyone's had moments when fingers can't type, mouths won't speak, and no matter the effort and whatever the task the hill seems like it can't be surmounted. Blocks are not just unique to writing or public speaking. The types of blocks that will be touched on can include everything from professional work to personal relationships. Blocks can inhibit the pursuit of both the constructive and destructive pursuits in life, but mostly the constructive. Most people would rather not experience the state of being emotionally and mentally blocked. If you sense you are stuck, it's important to realize everyone suffers from mental and emotional blocks. Even the highly intelligent.



Even the emotionally engaged. Both individuals experience the same type of anxiety. Maybe they're better at introspection, or

emotional processing, or just have a knack for getting themselves unstuck, but it certainly is no easy task in solving your personal mental and emotional blocks! How do highly intelligent and motivated people navigate these blocks? The premise below was inspired by a mentor. It's my mission to see if I can answer some of those questions.

*Highly intelligent people can also be highly motivated. However, these two traits together do not necessarily infer the individual will complete a specific task or goal with any regularity. Frequently, mental, and emotional reasoning is used, such as "this is too overwhelming, this is more than I can handle" to actively disengage from a specific task or goal. The primary question is as such, how does an individual overcome emotional and mental blocks to be successful?*

Before we can get an answer, how are mental and emotional blocks defined? According to the American Psychological Association (APA) mental and emotional blocks can be defined as follows:

Emotional Blocking: *“the inhibition of thought, speech, or other responses due to extreme emotion, often associated with extreme fear.”*

Mental Blocking: *“a psychological barrier or obstacle that obstructs or impedes a process, function, or activity.”*

Barring the technicality of the definitions, some examples could include failure to report emotional and physical abuse in relationships, refusal to participate in sports after an injury, or regular underperformance, all of which can be signs of both mental and emotional blocks.

Emotional and mental blocks usually develop in three different ways. The first, painful or difficult unresolved experiences which we have buried deep in our psyches. e.g., physical, and emotional abuse in relationships. These blocks are almost always unconsciously brought into new relationships—especially intimate ones. The second, lack of knowledge and experience creates a lack of confidence, e.g., routine failure. Constant failure is a potent force in developing mental blocks, for example,

coming in 2nd place, not once, but every time. Internally, 2nd has become normalized, while 1st place remains unattainable. The third, fear of the unknown creates paralysis and incapability to cope. Of course, not knowing often precludes failure. This can be especially significant in a position of great responsibility. Many would ask, why take the chance? **More generally, any type of trauma, sudden change, death, or any type of failure small or large, can act as triggers for mental and emotional blocks.**

Identifying emotional and mental blocks *can* prove challenging, especially for those with little ability for introspection. If you feel like identifying your emotions is difficult, read over some of the symptoms for emotional and mental blocks listed below. For mental blocks: self-doubt, indecision, fixed mindset, comparison, uncertainty, no limits (denying reality), and tunnel vision.

For emotional blocks: social avoidance, increased anxiety and stress, lack of motivation, intense negative emotions, unyielding worrying, and difficulty making decisions. Experiencing any of

these consistently over long periods of time can have potential adverse effects on health and wellbeing.



If reading the list of symptoms does **not** help in identifying your emotional and mental blocks, consider if you've experienced one or more of the following scenarios: you have unrealistic expectations of others that results in alienation; thinking about what you *should* do is making you miserable; you cringe every time you see their contact in your phone; you feel guilty when someone lets you down; you get a nagging feeling when you think about someone; you have many uncompleted projects. Lastly, if you can identify whether you are *experiencing* a mental or emotional block in any part of your life, try to identify where and when it started: in adulthood or childhood, at work or school, because of success or failure? Once the emotional or mental block has been identified, the right remedies and tools are needed to fix whatever type of block you're facing.

The first tool is forgetfulness.

Forgetfulness? Yes...at least partially.

More specifically the inverse forgetting curve—an altered version of the forgetting curve. If you've ever heard of the forgetting curve, we're going to be using it as a basis for a concept that can help break mental and emotional blocks. If you haven't, it's recommended you familiarize yourself with the forgetting curve. A technical definition of the inverse forgetting curve follows: artificially induced forgetfulness of negative experience through the spaced repetition of affirmed positive experience. If that's a little too convoluted, essentially, the place in the brain where that specific negative experience exists, and it's associated mental or emotional block, is over-written by, not exact, but related positive experience. Consider the following story.

A minor league baseball player struck-out *every* at bat over the course of a season.

The player had developed so much anxiety about being at bat he developed an internal block. He began to believe he couldn't and would not be able to hit the ball. Thus, he stopped trying. The coach, along with the player's teammates, did

their best in providing moral support and motivation. Unfortunately, the afflicted player developed emotional and mental blocks so severe that they couldn't be convinced otherwise.



The coach recognized that unless the player could associate positive feelings with being at bat, it was incredibly unlikely he would return to play again next season. Normally, a coach might suggest the use of the batting cage following practice. In this case, the coach realized that unless those negative feelings are forgotten, the player likely won't practice hitting unless forced. Over the summer period of three months, after the league had ended, the coach helped the conflicted baseball player build their confidence through small, incremental steps.

First, the use of a batting tee. After the player made consistent contact with the tee, the coach would pitch to a spot beside the player all whilst the player continued to use the tee. After an association between hitting the ball and receiving the pitch was built, the coach transitioned to underhand pitching.

Once the player consistently made contact with the ball, the coach transitioned to pitching normally. If it's not already clear, the coach was trying to accomplish two things: 1) build positive associations through small steps and 2) help the player forget their trauma over the course of a summer. The concept of the inverse forgetting curve only works if the individual can forget the details of past trauma and is able to replace counterproductive blocks with a productive experience.

The second remedy, much like the first, utilizes increments to aid the individual in overcoming their personal emotional and mental blocks. This method is called task chaining (TC). Task chaining is a great method in using seemingly unrelated positive experiences to help build confidence in other areas, those areas in which you might suffer from mental and emotional blocks. Think of this as more than connecting the dots between point A

and point B; effective task chaining is more likely connecting the dots between point A and point G. The objective is to recognize the emotional and mental blocks of any individual are not isolated. They can be tinkered with in a variety of ways. It's not essential that they be dealt with head on—think **ulterior**.

To use task chaining effectively, the mental or emotional block must be identified, *as well as* an equal but opposite experience that comes with ease. After each has been identified, get a piece of paper, and draw a five-step ladder. Once the ladder is completed, put the positive experience at the top, and the mental or emotional block at the bottom. The tricky part comes next. Within five steps, relate one to the other. Let us illustrate with the following example:

*An individual has struggled with completing a personal written project. They are finding it incredibly difficult to move past a block they have had for months. In the past, they've experienced the same phenomenon. For years they worked under usually intolerable stress for the sake of their career. All those years carrying work related anxiety ultimately culminated in a moment of extreme emotional and mental blockage. For months their stress and anxiety has only become*

*more compound as they continue to fail to meet project deadlines, only to have their stress and anxiety result in a mental emotional block outside work. Unfortunately, the individual has conflated work stress and personal life, creating a very inconvenient and unwarranted block.*

Task chaining can effectively break these associations if done correctly. For the scenario above, the identified block is impeding their ability to complete a personal writing project. We can help this person break these associations by using the five-step method. To start, working backwards, try listing some loosely related tasks. For example, beginning at 5) the block of a personal writing project; 4) the ability to write cards; 3) making greeting cards; 2) designing greeting cards; 1) doing arts and crafts. It may seem unintuitive, but according to the five-step ladder above, the first step in overcoming this block could be time committed to completing arts & crafts projects. To explain further, in response to the anticipated question of “*how do arts and crafts help in curing*

*blocks?”* The answer is that it is done to broaden the scope of the project.



It's in this way that we can see how the block is inhibiting only a portion of the overall project instead of its entirety. Once a reasonable task chain has been determined, the individual should begin their personal project in the inverse of the steps above. First, by doing an array or assortment of nonsensical arts and crafts. After some creative energy has been expended, the task would become more pointed. As such, designing greeting cards, and subsequently each additional step until the original project is the focus. As the project is now part of something larger, the mental block should be easier to manage. The most important aspect of this method is getting momentum through task chaining and extending the

original project into something larger. With this newly acquired momentum you can smash through the wall of emotional and mental blocks. By expanding the scope of the task to include other tangentially relevant tasks, you've transformed the box holding the block from an impenetrable safe to a hole in the ground with sloped sides.

Sometimes, one's own will is not realistic. And sometimes, the greatest aid is derived from those who provide external support. If you've identified your emotional block and tried to work through it independently without success, the next step should be to seek external support or counseling. Two possible counseling methods are group counseling and cognitive behavior therapy.

Group counseling provides a format in which any individual can feel a sense of connectedness with others experiencing similar troubles.



Group sessions allow for any person to gain much needed perspective about how to deal with their personal blocks. These sessions are often another good resource to find methods to overcome personal blocks through discussion and exchange of ideas. If group counseling feels too exposing, the next recommendation would be private cognitive behavior therapy sessions.

Cognitive behavior therapy, as per the APA, *“is a type of psychotherapeutic counseling that helps people learn how to identify and change destructive or disturbing thought patterns that have a negative influence on behavior and emotions.”* Although there are many types of cognitive behavior therapy, the majority rely on these core tenets as a

counseling philosophy: identifying negative thoughts, practicing new skills, goal setting, problem solving, and self-monitoring. If you decide to pursue cognitive behavior therapy, you can expect to operate within this framework.

The tools and counseling suggestions outlined thus far provide only a partial remedy for mental and emotional blocks. It would be a disservice to not outline, as well, the realities in dealing with emotional and mental blocks. Working through your blocks individually or with a group can have a significant impact on how you resolve your blocks and how resilient you become to developing new blocks. While utilizing outside resources can be incredibly important in tackling mental and emotional blocks, the subsequent offloading onto those around you is temporary if you don't work to solve these problems on an individual basis as well. Second, have a goal. It is important to understand why you want to resolve the emotional and



mental block. Without a clear goal or justification of getting treated or working individually, you risk 'burning out'. A goal provides energy, direction, justification, and guidance. Lastly, you might not succeed initially, that's part of the process. *"As one study shows, roughly 80% of people who have made New Year's resolutions don't achieve their goal by the second week."* It's no secret mental and emotional blocks are the reason that changing behavior is difficult.



That's why being realistic, measured, and consistent is so important to achieving success. Undershooting a goal is OK, if progress is made. Better to build a foundation made of bricks than a

foundation made of sand. It might not be as comfortable initially, but it will certainly provide stability later. You'll thank yourself for it.

Patience, objectivity, and empathy are needed to overcome the internal crisis of mental and emotional blocks.

In summation, identification, observation, pursuit, and support are pivotal in overcoming mental and emotional blocks—and if not successful the first time, finding the will to try again. Above all else, recognize that *starting* is the most important step. The place from which you begin your journey can determine how far you make it—whether you complete it or need to start again. Most of all, ingrain in yourself that it is not all or nothing. For Alexander the Great, waking up was the first step in conquering the world.

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