

When you replay a conversation

A little room between what happened and what you fear it meant.

The conversation has ended, but your mind is still there: the pause, the joke, the words you wish you had chosen. That replay can be exhausting. You do not have to reach a final verdict on how you came across before returning to your day.

Try one brief check-in

- 1. Separate the event from the interpretation.** 'There was a pause' describes an event. 'They found me boring' is an interpretation. You may not know what the other person thought.
- 2. Look for one useful action.** Was there a specific misunderstanding to clarify or something hurtful to apologise for? If so, choose a proportionate response. If not, you can leave the conversation unfinished in your mind.
- 3. Come back to something here.** Notice the object in front of you, listen to familiar music, or continue a simple task. The memory may return. You can notice it without reopening the whole review.

Words for a trusted person

I'm caught up in replaying that conversation. Could we have some company or do something ordinary together? I don't need a detailed verdict on how I did.

If useful: One fact I know: ____ One thing I cannot know: ____ What I will do next: ____

Use this once if it helps; it need not become another checking routine. You can skip writing. If someone actually mistreated you, seek support with that rather than explaining it away as anxiety.

More support: If replaying, fear or avoidance repeatedly disrupts sleep, work or relationships, speak with a doctor or qualified mental health professional. CBT designed for social anxiety is a recommended treatment. This sheet is only a starting point.

If you are in immediate danger or cannot keep yourself safe, contact local emergency services or a recognised crisis service where you live. Someone to listen, day or night: Samaritans 116 123 (Ireland, UK); text HELLO to 50808 (Ireland); call or text 988 (US, Canada); Lifeline 13 11 14 (Australia); call or text 1737 (New Zealand); elsewhere, findahelpline.com lists free helplines.

Further help: [Building a social life](#)

Further reading and sources: jonathanhaverkampf.com: [Social anxiety](#) | [NICE: Treatments for adults with social anxiety](#) | [CCI: Social anxiety resources](#)

Sources checked 29 October 2026. Educational information; not a diagnosis or complete treatment.

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Confidence before you feel ready

Make the next step small enough to belong to you.

You might be waiting to feel confident before asking a question, trying something new or joining in. On some days that feeling never arrives. A different starting point is to choose one action you care about, with the support you need.

Choose a step, not a new personality

1. Name what matters. Perhaps you want to learn, have company, or say what you need. 'I want to ask one question about the class' is more useful than 'I must seem confident.'

2. Make it manageable. You might write the question first, send it instead of speaking, or ask someone to come with you. These are good ways to start. Later, when you feel ready, you could try the next step with a little less help, for example asking the question out loud yourself. This is only about help you use because of nerves: keep any communication aids or access adjustments you need. A smaller step still counts as a choice.

3. Notice the action afterwards. Try 'I asked even though I felt uncertain.' Another person's reaction is partly outside your control. You do not need to turn each attempt into a score for your worth.

A way to ask for support

I'd like to try this, but I'm nervous. Could you help me make the first step smaller, without pushing me to do more than we agree?

If useful: Something I care about: ____ A step I choose: ____ Support or an adjustment I need: ____

Rest, declining an invitation and changing the plan can also be reasonable decisions. The point is having more choice. Nobody needs to become outgoing, hide a disability, or tolerate discrimination to prove confidence.

More support: If fear, low mood or self-criticism keeps limiting your life, a doctor or qualified mental health professional can help you explore it. Where cost is a barrier, ask about public, community or low-cost services. Availability varies by country.

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Further help: [Find mental health help](#)

Further reading and sources: jonathanhaverkampf.com: [Low self-esteem: why it happens and how it can change](#) | [NHS: Raising low self-esteem](#) | [CCI: Self-compassion](#) | [CCI: Social anxiety resources](#)

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A kinder view of yourself

When appearance or comparison takes up too much space.

A photograph, a comment or a few minutes of scrolling can leave you seeing yourself through a very harsh lens. You do not have to love every part of your appearance to deserve care, company and a place in ordinary life.

Make room for more of who you are

- 1. Notice the judging voice.** Try 'I'm having a harsh thought about how I look.' You do not need to argue yourself into the opposite claim or ask someone to rate your appearance.
- 2. Widen the picture.** Name a value, interest or relationship that matters to you: curiosity, humour, caring for an animal, enjoying a story. These parts of your life need not wait for a better photograph.
- 3. Choose an act of care.** Put on something comfortable, return to an interest, or make contact with someone respectful. If a particular feed leaves you comparing, you can mute it or take a break.

Words that set a boundary

I'm finding comments about appearance difficult. Could we leave looks and weight out of the conversation and talk about something else?

If useful: One part of my life beyond appearance: ____ One way I can care for myself today: ____

You do not owe anyone a photograph, an explanation of your body, or a positive statement you do not believe. Hurtful comments and prejudice deserve support; they are not proof that you need to change yourself.

More support: If appearance worries, checking or hiding take up a lot of time, or affect eating, leaving home or relationships, speak with a doctor or qualified mental health professional. These difficulties deserve assessment and care. This sheet cannot diagnose or treat body dysmorphic disorder or an eating disorder.

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Further help: [Find mental health help](#)

Further reading and sources: jonathanhaverkampf.com: Self-compassion: being kinder to yourself | [CCI: Appearance concerns](#) | [NHS: Body dysmorphic disorder](#) | [CCI: Self-compassion](#)

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When your mind goes blank

A few words for the moment you cannot find yours.

You want to join in, but suddenly cannot think of anything to say. You may feel exposed or frustrated. There is no requirement to produce an interesting reply instantly. A conversation can include pauses, clarification and a change of subject.

Keep a few options, not a script to perform

- 1. Give yourself a moment.** You could say, 'Let me think for a moment.' A pause does not need an apology. If you prefer, take time silently.
- 2. Return to something they said.** Turning your attention to what they are saying, rather than to how you are coming across, often makes words easier to find. 'You mentioned a new project. What has that been like?' Pick something you are interested in. One question is enough; you do not need to keep the other person talking at all costs.
- 3. Clarify or finish kindly.** Try 'I lost the last part - could you say it again?' Or 'It was good to talk. I'm going to take a break.' Either person can choose to end the conversation.

If an adjustment would help

I find it easier to follow a conversation somewhere quieter. Could we move, or continue by message later?

If useful: One phrase that sounds like me: ____ A setting or way of communicating that suits me: ____

Use your own language and communication style. Eye contact, a quick answer and constant smiling are not requirements. Text, signing, communication devices and extra processing time are valid. Respect someone's choice not to engage; friendly contact does not require persistence.

More support: If fear of conversations repeatedly keeps you from things you want or need to do, speak with a doctor or qualified mental health professional. Support can address anxiety while respecting your communication needs. You do not have to explain your whole history to ask for an appointment.

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Further help: [Communication and appointment prompts](#)

Further reading and sources: jonathanhaverkampf.com: [Social anxiety](#) | [NHS: Social anxiety](#) | [NHS: Talking about your mental health](#) | [CCI: Social anxiety resources](#)

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When dating leaves you doubting yourself

An unanswered message is not a complete account of you.

A date does not lead anywhere. Someone stops replying. It can hurt, especially when you had begun to hope. You are allowed to feel disappointed without turning one person's decision into a judgement of everything you have to offer.

Give disappointment somewhere to land

- 1. Name what happened plainly.** 'They do not want another date' is different from 'Nobody could want me.' You may not learn their reasons. You do not need a final explanation to step back.
- 2. Respect both people's choice.** It can be tempting to send one more message. Letting a no, or silence, be the answer protects your dignity and respects theirs; please do not contact them through another account. You can also stop dating or messaging someone, even if you previously said yes.
- 3. Reconnect with the rest of your life.** Choose one ordinary source of company or interest: a friend, a hobby, a familiar routine. Consider an app break if using it is leaving you depleted. There is no deadline to try again.

What to ask a friend for

I'm disappointed and being hard on myself. Could you keep me company? I would rather not analyse their profile or work out how to win them back.

If useful: Something I want in a mutual relationship: _____ Something supportive I can do now: _____

Dating is optional. You do not have to earn attention by changing your boundaries, sending intimate images, spending money or accepting disrespect. If you experience pressure, threats or abuse, seek trusted or specialist support; it is not your fault.

More support: If distress persists or affects your daily life, a qualified mental health professional can help. For safety concerns, contact specialist services where you live; the eSafety link below is Australian, though its safety tips apply widely. In immediate danger, contact local emergency services.

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Further help: [Dating at your own pace](#)

Further reading and sources: jonathanhaverkampf.com: [Rejection in love: why it hurts](#) | [eSafety: Online dating safety](#) | [NHS: Raising low self-esteem](#)

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Relaxation without forcing calm

Choose one gentle option. Feeling calmer is not a test.

When you are tense, being told to relax can feel like another demand. These small options are invitations. Choose a comfortable position and a place where you do not need to drive, supervise a hazard or stay alert to danger.

Try just one option

- 1. Let breathing be easy.** If breath focus feels comfortable, let the breath move gently at a pace that suits you. Avoid forcing deep breaths or holding your breath. Start with a few comfortable breaths; no counting target is needed.
- 2. Try a gentle release.** If your hands are comfortable and uninjured, lightly tense them for a few seconds, then release and rest. Breathe normally. Notice any difference. Skip painful areas or simply rest without tensing; ask a clinician if unsure about a health condition.
- 3. Keep attention outside your body.** If inward attention is uncomfortable, listen to a familiar sound, look at an ordinary object, or do a gentle familiar activity that suits your mobility. You do not have to use a breathing exercise.

Words for someone nearby

I'd like a quiet moment, but focusing on my breathing doesn't suit me. Could we listen to something familiar or sit together instead?

If useful: What felt comfortable, neutral or unhelpful? ____ Would I choose it again, change it, or stop? ____

Stop if you feel dizzy, breathless or in pain. If you feel more panicky or disconnected, pause, breathe normally and switch to option 3, noticing your surroundings. A few people feel uneasy at first; you can try a shorter version another time, or leave it. Seek medical help for new or severe physical symptoms; do not assume they are anxiety.

More support: These are brief introductions, not treatment or a full relaxation programme. If distress keeps returning or exercises make things worse, ask a qualified professional for advice. You do not need to become calm before seeking support.

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Further help: [Find mental health help](#)

Further reading and sources: jonathanhaverkampf.com: [How to reduce anxiety immediately: grounding and breathing](#) | [NHS: Breathing exercises for stress](#) | [NHS inform: Progressive muscle relaxation](#) | [VA: Coping with traumatic stress reactions](#)

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Mindfulness in an ordinary moment

Notice what is here, without having to make it perfect.

Mindfulness means bringing attention to present experience with less judgement. It does not require a silent mind. You can explore it in an ordinary activity, without a special app, equipment or a long session. It may suit you, or it may not.

Try noticing one everyday thing

1. Choose something ordinary. Sit with a familiar object, listen to a sound, or notice a comfortable point of contact with your chair. Pick a sense that is available and comfortable for you. Keep your eyes open if you prefer.

2. Notice one detail. Perhaps a colour, a texture or a change in sound. You do not have to describe it well. If you notice a thought, you might quietly say 'thinking' and return to the detail, without arguing with the thought.

3. End with a choice. After a short moment, return to what you were doing. Ask what would help now: continuing a task, taking a break, asking for support or addressing a practical problem.

A way to invite company

Would you like to pause with me for a moment? We can keep our eyes open, and either of us can stop. We don't have to talk about what we noticed.

If useful: Something I noticed: ____ Something I need next: ____ You can leave both blank.

Mindfulness does not mean accepting mistreatment or ignoring a problem. If noticing sensations or thoughts increases distress, stop and reconnect with your surroundings or a trusted person. You can choose an ordinary activity instead.

More support: Mindfulness helps some people and makes some feel worse. Most research looks at longer courses; this short exercise is a way to see whether the approach suits you. If it does, structured courses exist; in the UK, NICE recommends mindfulness-based therapy for less severe depression. This exercise is not a treatment for social anxiety, trauma or another condition. If symptoms persist, are severe or disrupt daily life, seek qualified support.

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Further help: [Find mental health help](#)

Further reading and sources: jonathanhaverkampf.com: Anxiety self-help | [NHS: Mindfulness](#) | [NCCIH: Meditation and mindfulness - effectiveness and safety](#)

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A gentle first meditation

A short invitation to practise returning your attention.

Meditation includes many practices from different traditions. This is one simple attention exercise. There is no special state to reach and no promise of feeling better. Try it only if you want to, somewhere you can safely pause.

Begin with a minute, or less

1. Settle in a position that suits you. You may sit, stand or lie comfortably. Keep your eyes open if that feels better. Choose a gentle sound or an object to rest your attention on. Breathing is another option, only if comfortable.

2. Let your attention rest there. Notice the sound or object for a moment. When attention wanders, acknowledge that and return gently. You do not need to push thoughts away or keep count of distractions.

3. Finish deliberately. Look around or notice familiar sounds. Move in a way that suits you and return to your day. You can finish earlier than planned. A timer is optional, and there is no right length.

Something to tell a teacher or professional

I'd like to explore this carefully. I prefer to keep my eyes open and focus on a sound. If I feel worse, I'll stop.

If useful: Did this feel comfortable, neutral or difficult? ____ My choice for next time: ____

Stop if panic, upsetting memories or a sense of unreality grows. Look around, notice where you are, and seek support if it continues. If meditation has unsettled you before, or you have severe symptoms now, talk with your treating professional before trying again. Do the same before any long or intensive retreat if you have had psychosis, mania or severe trauma.

More support: Research on meditation varies by practice and condition, and unwanted effects can occur. This short exercise is simply a way to try the idea. Keep prescribed treatment and appointments, and do not use meditation to postpone needed care. Choosing not to meditate is a valid choice.

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Further help: [Find mental health help](#)

Further reading and sources: jonathanhaverkampf.com: [Free mental health resources to read, print and share](#) | [NCCIH: Meditation and mindfulness - effectiveness and safety](#) | [VA: Coping with traumatic stress reactions](#) | [WHO: Doing What Matters in Times of Stress](#)

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