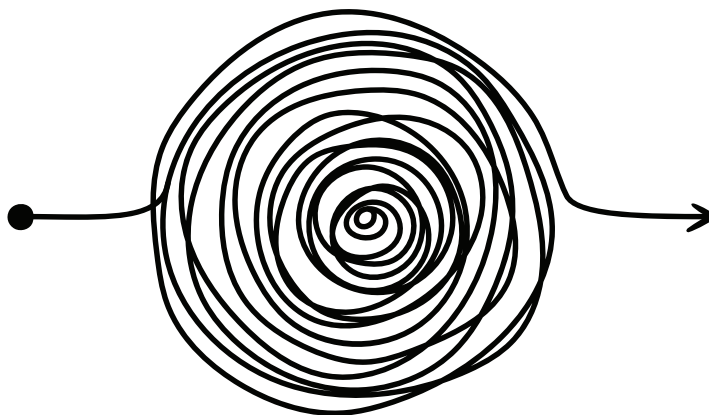


Understanding and Managing Rumination

The Difference Between Problem-Solving and Rumination

Rumination can feel like problem-solving, but they are very different. Rumination keeps you stuck, while problem-solving helps you move forward.



What Rumination Looks Like:

- Repeating the same thoughts without progress
- Dwelling on “Why did this happen?” or self-blame
- Feeling stuck, overwhelmed, or mentally drained
- No clear plan or action results from the thinking
- Attention stays on the past or perceived mistakes

What Problem-Solving Looks Like:

- Identifying a specific issue you can influence
- Generating possible solutions
- Choosing one realistic step to take
- Taking action and evaluating the outcome
- Focusing on the present and future, not the past

Why Rumination Can Feel Like Problem-Solving:

- The brain is trying to understand what went wrong or prevent it from happening again
- Replaying events can feel like careful analysis, even when no new information is gained
- Strong emotions such as stress, regret, or frustration keep the mind focused on the issue
- Thinking repeatedly can create the sense that you are being responsible or thorough
- Rumination feels active, which can make it hard to recognize that it isn’t leading to solutions

How to Shift From Rumination to Problem-Solving

- Pause and ask yourself, “Is this something I can take action on right now?”
- If the answer is yes, clearly define the problem you can influence
- Write down a few possible options instead of thinking them over repeatedly
- Choose one small, realistic step rather than trying to solve everything at once
- Take action, then pause to see what worked and what didn’t
- If the answer is no, redirect your attention to something grounding, meaningful, or task-focused
- Use activities, movement, or conversation to help your mind shift out of the loop
- Keep problem-solving time limited, structured, and focused on next steps—not on blame or the past

Rumination keeps you focused on the problem. Problem-solving helps you move toward a solution. With awareness and practical tools, it is possible to interrupt the cycle of rumination and regain mental clarity. For additional support and resources, reach out to the EAP or visit EAP4YOU.com.