



Getting unstuck

Tonight, the familiar crisis occurred yet again at bedtime. My six-year-old couldn't find BunBun. She cried out to me for help with all kinds of unhuman noises. She jumped up and down. She blamed her brother. When I suggested she look for her teddy she yelled: "I have looked! She's not here!"

What had happened? She'd got 'stuck'. Her issue had become all-encompassing and the apparent futility of her efforts to solve the problem had overwhelmed her; she'd become trapped in a cycle of anguish and helplessness that led to more inaction and therefore more anguish. (BunBun was, of course, under her pillow.)

Have you ever experienced this kind of getting 'stuck'? It might have been trying to figure out an issue at work or deciding what to have for lunch. For me it's so much worse when I'm hungry and tired. I become unable to make rational decisions, I go round in circles between the same few choices and quickly lose the will to live.

Your young people will also be familiar with getting 'stuck': subject choices, what colour hair to get, how to ask that girl out...

Ask them to tell you about a time when they got 'stuck'. What adjectives describe how they felt at different stages of the process? Did they manage to get 'unstuck'? What was it that helped?

BREAKING THE CYCLE

Put two chairs too close together and ask your mentee to try to walk between them straight on. Ask them to stay stuck between the chairs. How do they feel? What emotions do they have and which ones will help them get out? What are they focusing on? Do the exercise again but allow them to turn sideways and get through the gap.

Ask them to remember this exercise next time they feel stuck in a situation, that they turn sideways. They should stop, avoid getting sucked into the cycle of doom and approach it differently.

Discuss the following ideas and ask them to choose just one or two to try next time:

SLEEP ON THE PROBLEM

Have they stopped thinking about something and come back to it the next day with a fresh head?

Sometimes we have ideas in that in-between stage between being awake and asleep. You can even trick this into being by having a pretend nap! Lie down and prepare to have a short nap. Set a timer for about ten minutes. Actually try to have a rest and take your mind off finding a solution. Think about something else even as you drift off. Stop yourself short of falling asleep (unless you really need it!) and see if you have any wider or different kinds of thoughts or ideas about the situation.

TAKE A WALK

Do you get 'stuck' in the same place or similar places? Do something physical for a few minutes – literally go outside and sprint to the bottom of the road and back or do 20 burpees and get a good sweat on! Now go back and start again from the beginning, trying to work it out in a clear and organised process.

LOOK AT YOUR OBSTACLE FROM A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

If you look at a pen from the side, its shape is rectangular. If you look at it from the end it's more of a circle. Most problems have a different or 'lateral' way of looking at them.

LOOK AT THE PROBLEM FROM SOMEONE ELSE'S POINT OF VIEW

What advice would you give a friend if this was their problem, not yours? Go and speak to someone outside of the situation, or various people. Ask their opinion. Get more information.

JUST DO IT

A ship cannot turn if it is still. A rudder uses the movement of the water to redirect the entire vessel. Sometimes you just need to pick an option and get on with it. If it turns out to be the wrong or not the best choice, you can generally change your mind or start again. At least you'll now know, or at least not be so 'stuck'!