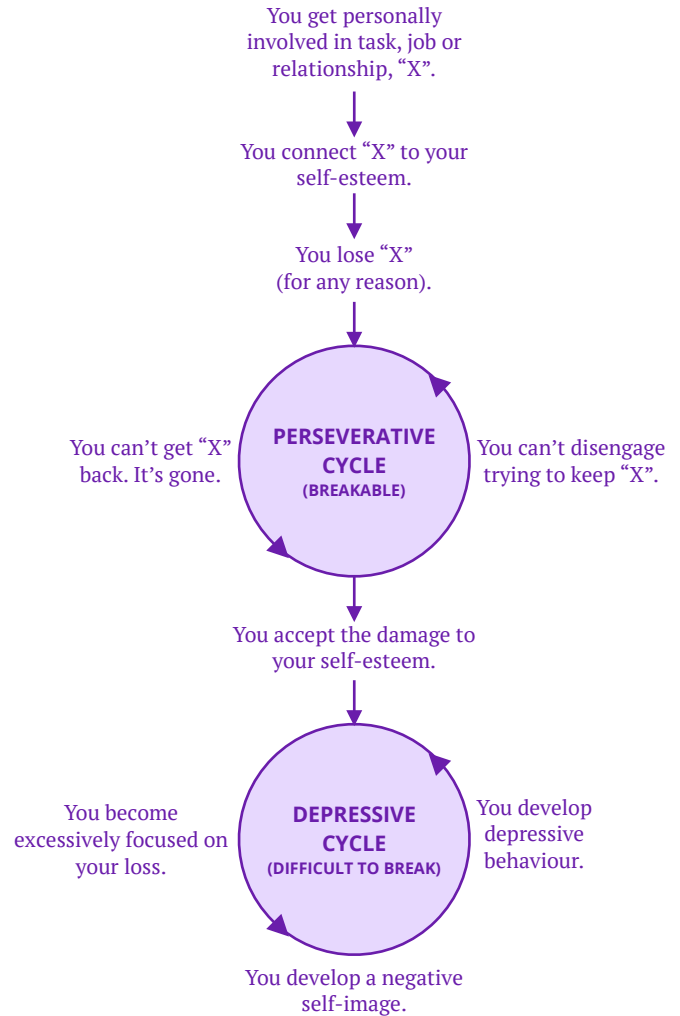


Getting “unstuck”

Sometimes, when we work at a job we really like, or spend time in a relationship we really care for, we can begin to personally identify with that job or relationship. When this happens, it is possible to fall into a trap: we can incorporate that object into our self-esteem.

Doing so puts us at risk. If the job is lost or the relationship comes to an end, we can become “stuck” in unwanted seeking behaviours. This is called “perseveration”: we can’t get the object back, but neither can we stop looking for it. If we don’t find a way to exit this cycle, we may wind up with serious mental health problems (Pyszczynski, 1987).

A job loss or break-up is an important milestone. Curiously, however, even just intensely working on a project for several days is enough to cause some people to perseverate. When the project is over, they may keep looking for ways to improve, refine or tweak it, in an effort to keep the experience alive. Not surprisingly, this can create interpersonal problems with other people who want to move on.



Fortunately, it is possible to break out of the perseveration cycle before it becomes a problem.



Set a timer to limit how long you can perseverate.



Find alternatives to replace what is lost.



Make physical changes to your environment.



Make a lifestyle change to disrupt your routine.



Distract and redirect yourself from perseveration.



Learn something new and expand your skill set.