

ACT WITH LOVE · DEFUSION

THE BAD-PARTNER STORY

Every mind tells a bad-partner story: the case it builds for everything wrong with your partner. It can feel like the plain truth, and it is a story, a set of thoughts your mind offers, not a verdict you have to accept. This is an ACT worksheet, from Russ Harris's ACT with Love, for unhooking from it.



THE STORY YOUR MIND TELLS

WHY IT'S SO CONVINCING

- When you're hooked, your mind lays out the evidence: they're selfish, they never listen, they'll never change. It sounds like a fair report. It's a story your mind is telling.
- The story isn't random. It's your mind doing its oldest job, scanning for what's wrong to keep you safe. Useful against predators, costly with a partner.
- Trouble comes when you buy the story as the whole truth and start treating your partner as if it were, which usually pulls more of the behavior you were dreading.
- Defusion is the ACT skill of seeing a thought as a thought. You don't argue with the story or try to delete it. You notice it, give it a name, and choose your next move on purpose.



WHEN YOUR MIND HOOKS YOU

Fill this in when the story is loud. Writing it down is itself a first step out, because the words on the page are easier to see as words. Complete each line with as many endings as come.

My partner is a...

e.g. slob · critic · flake

My partner is too...

e.g. controlling · lazy · sensitive

My partner is not enough of a...

e.g. team player · grown-up · listener

My partner does too much...

e.g. correcting · withdrawing · complaining

My partner doesn't do enough...

e.g. helping · initiating · appreciating

My partner lacks...

e.g. follow-through · warmth · patience

When I get hooked, here's how it changes the way I feel about and treat my partner:

When I get hooked, here's what it does to us:

UNHOOK FROM IT

You don't have to believe the story or fight it. These are the ACT moves for holding it lightly and staying free to choose how you treat your partner.

- 1 Give the story a name**
When it starts up, say to yourself: "here's the bad-partner story again." Treating it as a story you've heard many times before, rather than the truth of the moment, loosens its grip.
- 2 Thank your mind**
Try "thanks, mind, for the input." It sounds odd, and it works: it acknowledges the thought without obeying it, the way you'd nod at a backseat driver and keep your hands on the wheel.
- 3 Notice, don't obey**
The story will keep offering itself; that's what minds do. You can let it be there without acting on it, and put your energy into your values instead of its instructions.
- 4 Widen what your mind narrowed**
For an item or two on your list, name one thing that is also true and good about your partner. Not to cancel the story, to widen the picture your mind shrank down to one bad frame.



FROM STORY TO A MOVE

Unhooking makes room; this is where you use it. When a story has you stuck, pull it apart into the plain facts, the softer thing underneath, and one workable ask. Fill this in the next time you're hooked.

What my partner actually did (like a video, just the facts)

e.g. left the dishes in the sink and went to bed

The story my mind added on top

e.g. they don't care · they expect me to do it all · they're selfish

The softer thing under my story (the hurt or the need)

e.g. I feel taken for granted · I'm worn out and want a teammate

One workable ask I could make instead of the story

e.g. "can we each take the kitchen on alternate nights?"

The bad-partner story will visit for as long as you're together; that's what minds do. You don't have to win the argument with it. Seeing it as a story, and choosing your partner on purpose anyway, is what keeps one hard thought from hardening into how you treat each other. If the story has taken over and you can't get out from under it, that's what couples therapy is for. Adapted from Russ Harris's *ACT with Love* (the judgmental mind, defusion). My Mental Climb is not affiliated with or endorsed by Russ Harris or the developers of ACT.

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