

LET'S TRASH CAN IT

A playful exercise for thoughts you are tired of carrying

This is your permission slip to get something out of your head, look at it properly, and decide whether it deserves any more of your energy.

RULE OF THE BIN: We are not throwing away feelings, grief or experiences that need care. We are binning the unhelpful replay, impossible rule, stale criticism or mental clutter.

READY?

WRITE IT.

NAME IT.

SCRUNCH IT.

BIN IT.

You will need: this PDF, a pen, and - if you want the full version - a real waste-paper bin.

THE TRASH SLIPS

Write on them. Cut or tear them out. Screw them up.

SOMETHING SOMEBODY SAID

that I am DONE carrying

ONE MASSIVE SHOULD

I should... I must... I ought to...

A THOUGHT MY BRAIN HAS RECYCLED

far too many times

SOMETHING THAT BELONGS TO SOMEONE ELSE

their opinion, expectation or mood

A MISTAKE I HAVE ALREADY LEARNED FROM

lesson kept - punishment not required

A RIDICULOUS EXPECTATION

that no human could consistently meet

BEFORE YOU THROW...

Give it a 30-second inspection

Some rubbish is actually information in disguise. Circle the best destination for what you wrote.

ACT ON IT

There is a real action, repair, conversation or boundary I can make.

KEEP THE LESSON

There is something useful here, but I do not need the whole painful story.

ASK FOR SUPPORT

This is too heavy, frightening or confusing to deal with by myself.

LET IT BE UNRESOLVED

There is no certainty available right now. I can stop demanding an answer.

TRASH-CAN IT

There is nothing useful left. It is repetition, punishment or somebody else's baggage.

The useful bit I am keeping:

The bit I am binning:

READY... AIM... BIN IT!

Make the ending physical

Copy the sentence onto scrap paper, or use one of the slips. Read it once. Screw it up. Then throw it into a real bin.



Missed the bin? Excellent. Pick it up and throw it again. Therapy is allowed to contain a tiny bit of satisfaction.

THE BIG BIN ROUND

Seven quick things to clear out

1

One opinion I never asked for

2

One 'should' that makes life harder

3

One comparison that steals my attention

4

One old embarrassment my brain keeps replaying

5

One expectation that is not actually mine

6

One sentence from my inner critic

7

One thing I cannot control today

BONUS: Which one gave you the biggest sense of relief when you imagined putting it in the bin? That may tell you something about what has been taking up the most space.

WAIT - THIS ONE ISN'T RUBBISH

Some things need care, not disposal

If the paper contains grief, trauma, danger, abuse, a real unmet need, or something you genuinely need to address, do not force yourself to 'bin it'. Put it here instead.

KEEP & CARE FOR

What happened, and why does this matter to me?

I NEED...

support / rest / information / a boundary / time / a conversation

NEXT STEP

One small thing I can realistically do

IF THIS FEELS TOO BIG

Stop the exercise. Orient yourself to the room. Feel where your body is supported. Take one ordinary next action and reach toward appropriate support if you need it. A playful exercise should never become pressure to dismiss something important.

BIN NIGHT COMPLETE

What changed when you put it down?

You do not have to feel transformed. Even a tiny shift counts: less tension, a laugh, a clearer boundary, or simply recognising that a thought is not automatically an instruction.

BEFORE

How strong did it feel? 0-10

AFTER

How strong does it feel now? 0-10

WHAT I KEPT

The lesson, boundary, action or truth worth taking forward

WHAT I LEFT IN THE BIN

The replay, punishment, impossible rule or borrowed opinion

I DON'T HAVE TO PICK IT BACK UP.

A MESSAGE FROM MAGGIE

Sometimes putting something down can be serious - and still have a little humour in it.

Brains can hold onto comments, mistakes and expectations as though replaying them will eventually produce a different ending. Sometimes there is something useful to learn. Sometimes there really is an action to take. And sometimes we are simply carrying the same mental rubbish around with us.

I wanted this exercise to make that process visible. Write it down. Look at it. Decide what belongs to you. Keep the lesson if there is one. Get support when something needs care. And when the rest has genuinely finished its job, you are allowed to put it in the bin.

If the thought comes back tomorrow, that does not mean the exercise failed. Familiar thoughts return. You can notice it and say, 'I've already sorted this one.' You do not have to reopen every mental bin bag your brain puts back on the doorstep.

KEEP WHAT HELPS. TRASH-CAN WHAT DOESN'T.

Further reading & clinical basis

Russ Harris - The Happiness Trap: accessible ACT-based work on relating differently to difficult thoughts.

Steven C. Hayes - A Liberated Mind: psychological flexibility and values-based action.

Kristin Neff - Self-Compassion: useful when the 'rubbish' is harsh self-criticism or shame.

Clinical basis: cognitive distancing/decentering, expressive writing and ACT cognitive defusion. The trash-can metaphor is not intended as thought suppression or as a way to erase difficult experiences.

Sources: Hayes, Strosahl & Wilson (2012), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, 2nd ed.; Pennebaker & Smyth (2016), Opening Up by Writing It Down, 3rd ed.; Bernstein et al. (2015), Perspectives on Psychological Science.