

ROADWORTHY · THE STEADY DAD SERIES · No. 03

The 2am manual.

The hearing replayed. The text reread. The thing you should have said, drafted and redrafted on the ceiling at 2am. If that's your nights lately, this guide explains what the loop actually is, why trying harder to stop thinking makes it worse, and the three step protocol that closes it — plus the sleep basics that decide how much fight tomorrow gets.

What the loop actually is

Psychologists call it rumination, and it's not broken thinking — it's a good engine given an unfinishable job. Your brain treats unresolved threats as open loops and keeps returning to them, searching for a resolution the situation doesn't offer. The catch is the cost: every replay re fires the stress response as if the event were happening again. Which wrecks the sleep you're lying there not getting. Which shrinks tomorrow's self control before the day starts. Which makes tomorrow's provocations hit harder, which gives the loop more material. That cycle, left running, is quietly one of the most expensive habits in the whole family law process — and plenty of men live in it for years without anyone explaining it.

Why trying harder fails

You cannot out will a loop. “Stop thinking about it” hands the brain a job that requires thinking about it, and suppression reliably backfires — the loop returns harder, usually at 2am when there's nothing to compete with it. The fix isn't force. It's two moves: give the brain a different job, and formally close the loop it keeps checking.

The park it protocol

One line. Write the worry in a single line — one line is parking; three lines is solving, and solving is a daytime job. One appointment. Give it a real daytime slot, tomorrow, when the thinking brain is actually online. Pad down. When the loop returns — and it will — the answer is the same every time: “parked, 7am.” The brain accepts a scheduled resolution far more readily than a suppressed one, because the loop is now technically closed: the problem has a time and a place.

The loop isn't weakness and it isn't madness. It's an open case file the brain keeps pulling. Park it properly — one line, one slot — and the file gets a lid.

The sleep basics that actually move the needle

Broken sleep measurably shortens the fuse and shrinks self control before the day begins — you've lived it. The unglamorous levers: a consistent wake time (the anchor the whole system sets to), no case files or legal emails in bed, the phone charging out of arm's reach, and real movement during the day. If the mind is still racing after twenty minutes down, get up, sit somewhere dim, park whatever's looping, and come back when the heaviness arrives — beds are for sleeping, and the brain learns whichever lesson you teach it.

Roadworthy provides psychoeducation, mentoring and community grounded in positive behaviour support and psychology research on Australian men. This resource is general information, not clinical treatment or legal advice. If things are heavy right now: MensLine Australia 1300 78 99 78 or Lifeline 13 11 14, any hour. Dads in Distress 1300 853 437. If anyone is in



immediate danger, call 000. Family violence support: 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732).

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The park it pad.

Print this and keep it by the bed for seven nights. One line per worry, one slot per line, pad down, lights out. At the appointed time next day, give the worry its ten minutes: act on it if it's actionable, park it again if it's not. Both count as keeping the appointment.

NIGHT	THE WORRY, IN ONE LINE	ITS APPOINTMENT	KEPT?
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			

The five night rule. If the same worry parks itself five nights running, the tool hasn't failed — it's found something. A worry that won't stay parked is usually a trigger worth mapping, or a load worth telling someone about. And if the loop's content has turned toward hopelessness rather than the matter, don't wait for morning: MensLine is 1300 78 99 78, any hour, and it's exactly what they're for.

Part of the free Roadworthy self guided program — the full seven module Under the Hood series is at roadworthydads.com.au, along with the rest of the Steady Dad guides.