

## **Neural Rewiring for Eating Disorder Recovery: Farrar, Tabitha**

**Learned Emotions:** Just because an emotional response is a learned response doesn't make it "right" or "wrong". Understanding this is fundamental to developing the skills needed to choose which emotions you opt to participate in, and which you don't (12).

**Learned Words:** One of the brilliant ways our brains automate things to make life easier for us is by forming neural pathways to connect commonly associated situations with words. The word association games you may have played at some point are based on neural pathways (13).

**Learned Actions:** We move through life using countless learned and automatic actions, to which we need to become very mindful and conscious of (16).

**Learned Thoughts:** Initially our brain uses thoughts to help us justify what we are doing. We don't just have to rewire actions in recovery, we must rewire words, emotional reactions, thoughts, and belief systems (17).

**Learned Belief Systems:** Our brains like to form belief systems because they are helpful in streamlining our decision-making process and aid the automation of that process (18).

### **What forms our beliefs:**

- Everything you pay attention to
- Everything you watch
- Everything you read
- Everything you think about
- Conversations you have
- Conversations you listen to
- Podcasts you listen to
- Celebrities you admire
- Politicians
- What you were taught in school
- Your family's beliefs
- Your friends' beliefs
- Your wider culture's beliefs

Your brain is always watching, always learning, always absorbing. Once a belief has been constructed, our brains will protect it by rationalizing in a way to support that belief regardless of what happens (20).

**Redirects:** A redirect is an alternative action, thought, behavior. Often, the best redirects are the opposite action from the one you are trying to rewire (31).

If you can't identify a thought pattern or behavior, good luck changing it. So, identification or detection has to be the first goal when we are rewiring (33).

"Better" is not fully recovered (34).

**Super-Highways:** The behaviors, or groups of behaviors, that seem to be at the core of our eating disorder neural networks. They supply that network with a lot of strength, or energy.

Two common super-highways with eating disorders are compulsive movement and “healthy”/restrictive eating (38).

**Rewiring:** We cannot expect our beliefs to change if we are still acting as if they are true. Your actions inform your brain, so you must act the way you want your brain to think (43).

You can have all the good intentions to recover, but if you are still acting as if you are avoiding your natural unsuppressed bodyweight, your brain is still being taught, via your actions, that your body is a bad thing. The actions must come first, because your actions inform your brain. You won’t change your brain’s beliefs first. You have to change your actions first (44).

Rewiring is something that we all learn to do by having the intention of doing it (45). Actions are easier to identify and rewire than thoughts (47).

It’s always a choice to engage with an emotion and not get pulled in to the story of the emotion. You should prepare for them (50).

Train yourself out of the idea that there is virtue in food (58). Food is food – that is all.

Restricting the very foods my body was asking me for and pretending I didn’t want them was a form of dishonesty (59). Learning to eat truthfully requires stepping out of the robotic set of responses. Automatic “no thank you” protects you from having to assess true desires (60).

Learn to sit with the question, “Is that actually true?”