

Threat Thesaurus User's Guide

Brendan Lloyd PhD, December 2019

The *Threat Thesaurus* (TT) is a tool for naming the threats that we express in our head-chatter. We would do this to manage our adrenaline by resolving these threats. We would apply this effort because we understand the connection between elevated levels of adrenaline and the felt experience of anxiety.

The TT (Appendix A) shows a list of threats. You could call this a list of likely suspects. Not all of these threats would apply to you; perhaps two or three or four. You're likely to have your own list of favourites. In other words it will be the same threats coming up in your head-chatter regardless of its content.

Any threat requires a resolution. You need to know the threat to resolve it. The head-chatter has that information. From the head-chatter it is possible to name the threat **with the intention of** resolving it. The adrenaline will return to baseline soon enough once the threat is resolved.

The objective is to name the threat or threats that are expressed in the head-chatter. The first question is: what's the head-chatter about? We learn from the head-chatter. We learn that the head-chatter is about the threat, the threat of [*insert threat label*].

Capture the Head-Chatter

The head-chatter is the unrelenting expression of a threat or particular threats regardless of its content.

We need to capture the head-chatter because it's such a slippery customer. Our head-chatter is seductive; it sucks us in; it contains an element of truth but not the whole truth. It will disguise itself as thinking. We find

ourselves in it. We don't ever go there on purpose. It's often subconscious. Therefore, just by noticing it you're doing well for starters.

There is a skill development phase to capturing the head-chatter. To develop the skill you need to capture and write down samples of head-chatter. The skill development could take a few weeks of practise for a thorough job.

For the skill development you need to repeat the process; write it down then work it out. This is like an exercise repetition; like 10 push-ups very day. In this case it's at least one sample of head-chatter every day; write it down and work it out.

How much practise do I need? Personally I don't think that you could do too much practise for this skill; just so long as you have a sound understanding of what you're doing and why you're doing it.

In other words there would be thoughtfulness in your approach. To be thoughtful you do need to be clear about the difference between head-chatter and thinking. Thinking brings on the resolution whereas head-chatter brings on the adrenaline.

The content is boundless but the threats are few. Also you need to give it as much time as it takes to discover your full list of threats; this will be your list of favourites; it will be a short playlist; but it can be like an Easter-egg hunt to name them.

When it comes to writing down the head-chatter there are some recommended *dos* and *don'ts* to make life easier.

Firstly, develop your skill for noticing and focusing.ⁱ In other words, you notice that

you're in the head-chatter, and then bring your focus back to real-time. In other words, you need to step outside of your head-chatter to view it. You can't view it from within; you will not find the useful information from being immersed in the content. The content is the distraction; even if the content is embroiled in a grievance for example.

Secondly, when you write down the head-chatter you don't need to spend any time or effort describing anything. For example, you don't need to spend any time on describing the head-chatter or how you feel.

Just use the required time to write down the head-chatter *verbatim*, or as close to word-for-word as possible.

Thirdly, don't try to write it down whilst it's happening. Some of the most likely times for head-chatter are, whilst driving a car or having a shower or cutting a slice of cheese or whilst jogging or whilst preparing your child for bed or walking to the shops and so on.

In any case, even if you could dive for the pen and paper when you first notice some head-chatter, by the time you have the pen poised, the head-chatter will be gone; the opportunity will have passed.

For the skill development we need a strategy to remember the head-chatter so that we can write it down at the first opportunity.

There are two strategies that we can use to remember the head-chatter long enough to write it down. The main strategy would be to rehearse it. In other words, you repeat it in your mind so that it sticks.

The other strategy is to wrap the head-chatter in thinking. In other words you give the head-chatter structure to make it memorable. The thinking would sound something like this... "What did I just say then [*repeat the head-chatter to yourself*]? So what was I saying before that [*repeat the head-chatter to yourself*]? How did I get to that topic [*search your mind and repeat the head-chatter to*

yourself]? What was the trigger? So how did that go again [*repeat the head-chatter in your mind*]? " Etc.

For success here we need our *curiosity* and *interest* filters. We are not, for example doing this exercise to keep the adrenaline pumping. We do it to remember the head-chatter. So we are not capturing the head-chatter to dive deeper into it. You certainly wouldn't want to be developing the head-chatter; but we do need a good look at the head-chatter so that we can learn from it.

Capturing the head-chatter might be a formidable task for anyone. It might seem too embarrassing. We might *not want to know* about the head-chatter because of its content.

The natural curiosity that we need is the idea that we do need to know and that we want to know. It's like eating carrots; you have to chew because your gut needs the fibre. Curiosity shines the light in, to give you a good look; you might need to do it on purpose.

In the end, the content is not the focus. It's just that we need the content, intact, to see what the head-chatter is about; what it's about once you've looked passed the content.

Once written down we have it captured. With sufficient practise you will develop the skill of capturing the head-chatter without writing it down. You will be able to capture it in your head, standing on your feet.

Name the Threat

With the head-chatter written down we can go to work. Take the time to read the captured head-chatter with thoughtful-curiosity and interest. During the process of the skill development you will need to read it several times. Don't allow yourself to be sucked into the content. Or at least feel the growing distance between yourself and the content.

We need to listen in a certain way. We need to listen past the seduction of the content's drama and half-truths in order to hear the expression of the threat. The head-chatter after all is the expression of a threat or threats regardless of the content.

By capturing the head-chatter in writing means that we have an object. Now we look for objectivity. We ask a useful question.

Q: "What is the head-chatter about?"

A: The head-chatter is about the threat of [... *insert Threat Label* ...].

What we're looking for is a way to identify the threat. We need a label for the threat so that we can complete the answer. We need the answer to help resolve the threat.

The TT (see Appendix A) shows 11 Threat Labels in the left column. These labels each describe an identifiable threat as per its definition.

The Threat Labels are defined by the list of Theme Labels. The Theme Labels gather-in the definition for each Threat Label. Thus each threat is distinctive in the list. There should be little or no overlap in what each Threat Label represents.

Uncovering the threat is a step in the process for adrenaline management. For this to be practical we need fewer labels for our threats rather than an endless list. For example, threats of *time wasting*, *inefficiency* and *incompetence* can all be summed up as the threat of *imperfection*.

You can test the head-chatter's flavour, if you like, by using the *Head-Chatter sounds like...* column. You can ask, what's the head-chatter sound like? You're likely to have your own idea about what it sounds like; but read more than one set of examples. Don't just confirm what you believe you know, test what you know.

Test your theory out. For example you could ask the question, "Why would it be

Imperfection and not *Shame*?" Or, "Why would it be *Abuse* and not *Abandonment*?"

As an example, a person could notice the adrenaline as the felt experience of guilt. For a perfectionist this guilt-feeling could easily be mistaken as *shame* with the, *I'm not good enough*, head-chatter. On examination of the Theme Labels for *Shame* we see the threat of *exposure*, yes, but there is also a focus on threats of *scandal*, *disgrace*, *dishonour*, etc.

On the other hand the themes for *Imperfection* are the threats of *disorder*, *getting it wrong*, *time wasting*, *incompetence*, etc. So what fits the head-chatter better?

You could sum up by saying that the threat of *Imperfection* is all about the *rights and wrongs*; whereas the threat of *Shame* is all about *exposure*. Again, what fits better? At this point it is likely to be one or the other.

Likewise why would it be *Abuse* and not *Abandonment*? The head-chatter says, *she says she's working back late, yeah, I bet she's seeing someone else*. Both *Abuse* and *Abandonment* have paranoid themes so there could always be that initial confusion.

Abuse is all about the threats of *persecution*, *bullying*, *ridicule*, *corruption*, *attack*, etc. *Abandonment* is about threats of *desertion*, *being left*, *rejection*, *being forgotten* etc. In this example we could sum up by asking is the head-chatter about *being attacked* or is it about *being left alone*?

It would be safe to pick one over the other based on what you know about yourself. At the very least at the beginning of the skill development you can make a list of *likely suspects*. Over time your list of favourites will emerge.

What we're after in the end, from the period of skill development, is our list of favourites. In other words, you will most likely discover that you subscribe to more than one threat. Most likely in total your head-chatter is the expression of a small number of threats. This

will be your list of favourites.

Any one sample of head-chatter could be an expression of more than one threat. Most likely though, any one sample will not necessarily contain all your threats at once.

As I mentioned before, each of your threat will have a particular sound or voice if you like. For example, if you have *Imperfection* and say *Abandonment* as favourites, they will each sound different; you will not be confused once you understand how each of them sounds in your head-chatter. Do the exercise for yourself; look at the *sounds like* column in the TT; see how each threat sounds different to the others as an expression in

your head-chatter.

Over many repetitions of capturing the head-chatter and naming the threat or threats you will see the pattern emerging. You will truly get to know yourself. You'll see how your mind works. You get to see behind the curtains *as it were*. The same threat or sets of threats will always be there regardless of the content.

The TT is a tool for naming the threat with the intention of resolving it. By engaging in the process your adrenaline levels will return to baseline quickly enough. This is basic anxiety/stress management.

Appendix A: The Threat Thesaurus

Q: What is the head-chatter about?

A: The head-chatter is about the threat of [... insert threat label ...].

Threat Label The threat of...	Head-Chatter Sounds like...	Theme Labels The threat of...
Imperfection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can't they get it right? • I should do more. • Why do it that way? 	Chaos, disorder, getting it wrong, missing the details, broken rules, all going wrong, time wasting, disappointment, inefficiency, poor morality, stupidity, incompetence
Abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There're out to get me. • They're messing with me. • They do it on purpose. 	Persecution, bullying, ridicule, corruption, attack, exploitation, injustice, damage, trickery, crime, misrepresentation
Catastrophe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It will all go wrong. • A disaster is waiting. • It must be cancer. 	losing control, going mad, getting ill, accidents, calamity, devastation, disaster, emergencies, fiascos, meltdown, tragedy, trouble
Abandonment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'll be alone. • They'll find someone better. • They don't even think about me. 	Desertion, being left, rejection, being forgotten, being passed-over, not being noticed
Invalidation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't matter to them. • I'm invisible to them. • I do have a point of view. 	Annihilation, nullification, cancelation, dismissal
Shame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They'll find out what I'm like. • I will be shunned. • I'll be exposed and humiliated. 	Exposure, contempt, humiliation, embracement, scandal, disgrace, dishonour, stigma, infamy, smear, losing face
Subjugation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm powerless. • No one does what I want to do. • They just won't listen to me. 	Defeat, slavery, oppression, powerlessness, capture, domination, coercion, tyranny, repression
Failure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can't do it. • I'll never understand it. • It doesn't matter how hard I try. 	Personal inadequacy, disappointment, bankruptcy, breaking down, collapsing, fading out, defeat, loss, bungling, decay, downfall
Isolation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm not connected. • I was dropped here by aliens. • I'm alone amongst these people. 	Separation, segregation, alienation, homelessness, invisibility
Deprivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm always missing out. • It's not fair on me. • They just don't see my needs. 	Limitations, deficiency, constraint, rationing, solitude, indifference
Unfairness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do I have to do it all every time? • Can no one else see what needs to be done? • When do I take time off? 	Self-sacrifice, being taken advantage of, being used, not being appreciated, being taken for granted

ⁱ Three-Minute Breathing Meditation to practice the Noticing and Focusing: <https://byronbaypsychologist.com.au/onlineconsult/md-articles/02-Meditation-threeminutesbreathing.pdf>