What To Do When Your Source Upsets You

By The Dragonheart Collective

With input from the OtherConnect Discord Server

Why This is Necessary

Sometimes fictionkin and fictives have a complicated relationship to their source. This can be caused by a variety of things and can be managed well enough, but sometimes it can be hard to tell when interacting with your source is harming you more than helping you.

In our ~8 years in fictionkin spaces and ~7 years in plural ones, we haven't really seen any guides or essays about this, but we have seen a great many people who very clearly are being harmed by interacting with their source and its adjacent communities and it not occurring to them that there is a problem.

That is what this guide is for- cluing people into when there is a problem with their relationship to their source.

We ourselves have experience with this problem, and this document is in part advice we would have liked when we were younger. It was written both to be what we wished we had years ago and what we see a serious need for in the community now.

Warnings:

- This document is PG-13 for talk on trauma responses, self-harm, and suicide, as well as a very brief technical mention of sexual topics.
- While this document does its best to be accessible, the section 'On The Relationship Between Fiction and Reality' may constitute as 'reality checking' for some people with delusions around their fictional identity. Read with care.

Determining if its Causing Harm

Here are some things that may indicate your source is causing you harm.

Your identity fully hinges on what is 'canon' to the source to unhealthy degrees.
- You feel like you must change aspects of your identity to fit the new canon material regardless of your feelings.
- You feel like you wouldn't be accepted by your peers if you aren't canon compliant.
- You feel like you cannot have any opinions or hobbies that your fictional counterpart does not.

You frequently get into conflict in your source fandom about your identity.
- You frequently use your identity as an argument in fandom spaces.
- Your identity is strongly tied to the fact that you fight 'bad' people in your fandom.
- You have sent hate messages -especially threats- to others.
- You otherwise mostly interact in a negative fashion within your source fandom.

You can't recognize the difference between what is fantasy and what is reality.
- You believe people making content of your fictional counterpart are literally doing the things shown to you or wish to harm you.
- You believe people expressing thoughts about your fictional counterpart think those things about you the person.
- You otherwise cannot recognize that fiction is not 1:1 with reality and its causing you distress when others don't treat it like its 100% real.

Consuming the source is preventing you from doing normal life tasks.
- You skip meeting life requirements because you are busy consuming your source.
- Your relationships are suffering because you are busy consuming your source.
- You feel you need to consume new content as soon as it drops, no matter what.

Engaging with canon is tanking your mood.
- Interacting with canon makes you feel homesick, angry, depressed, or unsafe.
- Interacting with canon gives you mood swings, self-harming or suicidal thoughts, flashbacks, meltdowns, panic attacks, an identity crisis, or otherwise triggers you.
- Interacting with canon worsens any mental illness symptoms you have or gives you psychosomatic physical illness.
- You otherwise feel worse after interacting with or thinking about canon content.

Engaging with fandom is tanking your mood.

- Interacting with fandom makes you feel homesick, angry, depressed or unsafe.
- Interacting with fandom gives you mood swings, self-harming or suicidal thoughts, flashbacks, meltdowns, panic attacks, an identity crisis, or otherwise triggers you.
- Interacting with fandom worsens any mental illness symptoms you have or gives you psychosomatic physical illness.
- You otherwise feel worse after interacting with or thinking about fandom.

Engaging with canonmates is tanking your mood.

- Interacting with canonmates makes you feel homesick, angry, depressed, or unsafe.
- Interacting with canonmates gives you mood swings, self-harming or suicidal thoughts, flashbacks, meltdowns, panic attacks, an identity crisis, or otherwise triggers you.
- Interacting with canonmates worsens any mental illness symptoms you have or gives you psychosomatic physical illness.
- You otherwise feel worse after interacting with or thinking about canonmates.

The whole system is starting to be effected negatively if you are plural.

- Your upset is causing the whole system to be drawn into your trigger responses or is otherwise causing upset due to emotional bleedover/passive influence.
- Things from your source negatively trigger you into/out of front with frequency.
- Your consumption of the source is at the heart of serious system conflicts.
- Your system otherwise struggles to function or otherwise needs to compensate for the effect you consuming the source has.

Determining What About it is Causing You Harm

The next step is determining what is the root cause of that distress if possible. If you already know the answer, you can skip this step.

Some ways to determine this include:

- Writing down what it was that triggered or otherwise upset you each time it happens and looking for patterns.
- Noting negative interactions you've been having and if so what kinds of people and in what specific spaces.
- Asking your headmates what their opinions are if you are plural.

It may not be possible to note an exact cause at the moment, which is also fine.

Ways To Manage It And Still Interact With The Source

There are many ways to still consume the source while managing your issues with it. What ways are most effective will depend on what sort of things you need to avoid.

Here are a few good options;

- Having others prescreen the canon for certain content you.
- Only consume fan content instead of directly consuming the canon content.
- Use filtering options like 'blacklisting' and 'muting' to exclude certain content.
- Unfollow accounts that are posting content that upsets you.
- Stop interacting with fandom on certain platforms or in certain communities.
- Stop interacting with the fandom outside of your circle.
- Stop interacting with canonmates and stay in 'regular' fannish circles only.
- Stop interacting with fandom or canonmates at all entirely and only consume canon content.

When to Call it Quits

It can be hard to tell when you are at the point when you need to cut your losses.

Here are a list of things that indicate that you should take a break;

- When no managing techniques seem to be working.
- When managing techniques take so much effort its ruining your enjoyment.
- When any interaction with your canon at all upsets you.
- When you can't even comfortably think about your source.
- Its not 'sparking joy', only upsetting you when you consume it.

It is sad to let things go, and you are allowed to grieve for it if you decide to put it down. Engaging with it was a big part of your life and deeply profound for you, but there is a life to live in the here and now and continuing interacting is making that hard.

You are entitled to a way forward that does not hurt.

Common Things Preventing You From Quitting

Sometimes there are things that prevent you from quitting something. A few common reasons to hesitate and arguments against hesitating have been listed here.

<u>You need to have it for your sense of identity.</u>

You can find things to enjoy outside of the source to shore up your sense of self. There are endless possibilities of new hobbies or media properties to try out.

It can seem scary to drop something you put a lot of stake of your identity into, but you aren't dropping the identity itself, you are just not consuming content for awhile because its hurting you. You deserve to not be in pain.

<u>You need to have it for community.</u>

There are many other groups you can meet people through. Your source's fandom isn't the only way you can connect with others- there are groups around every kind of hobby under the sun.

You can meet new people and join new communities. If you diversify your social sphere, then if you ever need to leave a community you will still have a place to fall back on.

<u>You need to have it because its your hyperfixation/special interest.</u>

Sometimes hyperfixations and special interests can become maladaptive and hurt you. In this case its a good idea to try to reduce consumption or find a new interest.

Trying to get into a new hobby or media might give you a new special interest or hyperfixation that you can enjoy that doesn't hurt you.

<u>Your other system members are consuming it and you can't get away from it.</u>

Sometimes headmates have conflicts in interests and triggers, part of being plural is learning to compromise on some things in a way that lets you cohabitate. Express to your headmates that you need to avoid this media and why and offer up alternatives to them giving it up entirely.

Going Back to an Abandoned Source

After you're feeling stable, you may feel comfortable trying to engage with your source again. There is no 'one size fits all' process for doing so safely, but we will list some general tips.

<u>Weigh your decision carefully.</u>

Do you actually want to do this or do you just feel obligated to? What is your plan to prevent yourself from having an unhealthy relationship with your source again?

Consider these things carefully before moving forward.

<u>Take it very slow.</u>

Start with baby steps. If you have cut yourself off from even thinking about your source very much, then a good choice is to start with just daydreaming about your canon. If that goes well, try skimming the wiki or giving a browse of old AMVs.

Desensitizing triggers (if you have them) is hard work, but doable even without a therapist if done carefully. This should also be done incredibly slow.

<u>Know that its ok to only immerse to your comfort level.</u>
You don't have to go back to 'full immersion', you don't have to stop blacklisting things, and you don't have to stay if you don't want to. You are the master of your experience and you can choose to do whatever you like. There is no wrong way to feel about your source- including disliking it or its fandom and choosing not to consume it.

Fixing Your Relationship to Media And Fandom

One might be coy and call this section 'Media Behavioral Therapy', but <u>this is not therapy</u>. <u>We are not therapists</u>. We recommend obtaining a therapist if you are severely distressed or impaired by your relationship to your source if possible.

Therapy is not always an option for everyone though, which is why we have this brief rundown of things that may help you gain a healthier relationship to your source. These are tools that some may find helpful and some may not. Use your own judgment on what is or is not helping you.

Identifying And Desensitizing Triggers

A trigger is a particular stimulus that causes a response of some kind. In the context of this section, it will be used to mean trauma triggers, which are specific stimuli that cause a trauma-based stress response of some kind.

This stress response isn't always flashbacks or panic attacks. It may also cause meltdowns, dissociation, self harm, mood swings, intrusive thoughts, psychosis, and other kinds of stress responses.

Triggers themselves are often something innocuous that has been associated with the trauma. Anything may be a trigger- no matter how silly sounding.

One can identify a trigger when they notice they have a strong negative response to something. One may then remove them from their lives enough to stabilize.

Once you are no longer in crisis mode from being frequently triggered, you can begin the process of healing from your trauma and desensitizing yourself to the trigger.

NOTE- Desensitizing yourself to a trigger that is in response to an ongoing situation is not a good idea- its protecting you from harm still. Trying to get rid of it is unlikely to work well when you still need it and may make things worse.

When desensitizing- start slow. No- slower!

Do not jump into this. Wait until you feel ready, then start easing yourself into it. You will need to show your brain that the expected danger is not coming by showing it the trigger slightly over and over and rewarding it after.

If you are getting severe responses of any kind, this may be difficult if you do not address and do trauma work first on processing it. This sort of work on processing can take many forms and is a different process for everyone.

When you are ready to start desensitizing, plan out your exposure. Start very small, barely grazing a diluted form of the trigger (ie- For a dog phobia, look at pictures of doglike animals). Then during or directly after the micro-exposure, reward yourself with something you enjoy such as a favorite food.

Sex can be a very powerful tool to desensitize triggers and process trauma, though its high risk as well due to the delicate nature of triggers and using it in this way may also give you an undesirable fetish.

Whatever method you choose, this helps to rewire your neurons to consider the trigger to be something neutral-to-good, and will work even if you know the trick.

Repeat this until you no longer have any negative response to it, then slightly increase the level of exposure and repeat. Do this over and over until you have a sensitization level you are happy with.

If something goes wrong and you have a full unwanted response, decrease the exposure level before trying again.

Recognizing Less Obvious Self Harm.

This part talks about self harm in-depth, take care when reading.

Self harm doesn't have to be physically injuring yourself to be self harm.

Beating yourself down emotionally or putting yourself in potentially harmful or upsetting situations can also count. It can often be hard to notice when one is emotionally self harming as its rarely talked about as a type of self harm.

In the context of your source and related communities, this includes:

- Viewing things that you know contain content that will upset or trigger you.
- Seeking out people who's very existence upsets or triggers you.
- Behaving in ways that purposely draw the attention of 'cringe' sites, fakeclaimers, or anti-fictionfolk trolls because you want them to target you.
- Telling abusers about your identity so they incorporate it into the abuse.
- Self-harming in another way in response to something relating to your canon.

There is no one way to stop self-harm. Each person has different motivations and needs that are being met by self-harming.

Figuring out what motivates you, what needs you are getting met, and what you can do as a safer alternative can help you quit or reduce your self harm.

Some common needs that are met by self-harming include grounding, a sensory need, control, emotional support or help, and fulfilling a compulsion or impulse.

Finding alternate ways to indulge those needs so you feel better instead of worse after meeting them and doing so in a way that puts you in the least amount of danger can help improve your general stability and mood.

Anger Management on The Internet

There are some anger management techniques that are particularly helpful on the internet.

These include:

- Waiting a bit before posting so you can review it second time with a clear head.
- Temporarily leaving calls or chats when you are upset until you feel calm again.
- Remembering that real people exist on the other side of the screen.
- Remembering that you can always block people and leave spaces that upset you.

On The Relationship Between Fiction And Reality.

Things done in fiction are make believe. Things done in reality are reality. Fiction is created as a made up story by a creator, which went through many edits to be published.

Thinking, writing, or dreaming something does not provably cause it to happen in reality. Fantasy and fiction is not the same as reality- that is what makes imagination *imagination*. This reality, 'consensus reality' needs to be kept in mind over all else.

The inability to recognize these facts as true constitutes as magical thinking or delusions.

If you cannot function in a world that believes these things, it may be worth consulting with a therapist who can provide you with help doing so.

Its a good idea to stay firmly aligned inside of the above facts as it can prevent you from acquiring problems with doing so down the line if you don't already have issues with these concepts.

<u>The belief that fiction isn't real is NOT inherently violated by identifying as a character.</u>

There are many ways to reason your identity in a way that stays inside this, here are just a few of those ways;

<u>A general perspective:</u>
Whether or not your memories or of canon actually happened/are happening to you in another reality is irrelevant.

You are experiencing them as real, therefore they are real enough regardless.

You identify as a particular character, and that identity is also real regardless of the realness status of the fiction because an identity is a real thing.

<u>A spiritual perspective:</u>

Consider the Multiverse Theory. This is essentially a theory that there are infinite universes with infinite possibilities. Also consider the Infinite Monkey Theorem, or the theory that if you set monkeys at typing random keys infinitely, they will eventually produce anything.

These two theories can be combined, creating the belief that there are infinite universes with infinite possibilities and because of this, randomly created works of fiction that look similar to or exactly like the events of another universe will be produced independently as a coincidence.

The memories and 'knowings' you have of your kintype are real as the life is/was real in another world, and the identity is real because you are experiencing it. The fiction remains fiction however, as it was created independently of that reality.

One could describe this situation as being from an alternate universe that is very coincidentally similar to a work of fiction here to the point its easier to say 'im x from y' as a shorthand.

<u>A psychological perspective:</u>
In this one, one used the fiction as a 'template' to base an identity on/imprint on. In this, the identity is real, as you are experiencing it regardless of the origin.

The memories are experienced as real, even if they didn't 'actually happen'. **This does not mean their effects are any less real.** Psychological-based identities are no less real than spiritual ones.

The memories and 'knowings' you have of your kintype may be fabricated from an internal perspective, and the fiction remains fiction, but the identity is still very real.

The *experience* remains real and valid regardless of the explanation, even as the *fiction* remains fiction. These two ideas can and are coexisting in this fashion. They do not contradict each other. Practicing to hold these views at the same time can help you have a healthier outlook on fiction, fandom, your source and your relationship to those things.

Whether or not either of these example outlooks work for you, being able to hold 'my identity is real and valid' and 'according to the consensus reality this is just fiction and not real and I have to acknowledge this reality to engage with others harmoniously' will help reduce stress and give you better tools to handle your beliefs.

Two opposing ideas can be held at the same time, one is consensus reality, and the other is your personal reality. They do not have to be antagonistic to each other, and you can find ways to put them in equilibrium without dismissing one or the other.

On Punishment Not Being Constructive

Punishing yourself or others does not undo harm. The harm still happened, and it cannot be undone. Punishment only serves to indulge the punisher's desire of causing harm.

It is more constructive to build internal motivation to not do harm and give people tools to do better in the future and attempt reparations instead.

One example of a very base internal motivation has been provided below:

People dislike it when others are cruel to them or otherwise hurt them. When you cause harm to them, they will associate you with that harm and think negatively of you.

If they are not the ones harmed but they see you causing harm they may wonder if you will turn on them later. They may also have sympathy for those who are being harmed and feel upset. This then makes them think negatively of you.

When people think negatively of you, they are less likely to willingly help you, which means you have to exert far more energy in getting what you want from them if you can at all.

People who are not thinking negatively of you and instead think neutral-to-positively of you will then proceed to be more likely to help you get what you want.

People are less useful to you if they are distressed as well, as they are not working at optimum efficiency and become sloppy when upset.

<u>In terms of reparations;</u>

You cannot change the past, what you can do instead is move forward and choose to do better in the future. Finding alternative behaviors is the first and foremost most important thing to do. What alternative behaviors that cause less harm depend on the specific harmful action.

When alternative behaviors are implemented and consistently used, its time to make amends. They may not accept your apology, but that wasn't the important thing- it is the action of doing better going forward and acknowledging your wrongs that is key.

On what you can control

You can't control what others do, only what you do. What you CAN do is take steps for yourself.

You can't stop people from making specific kinds of content you dislike (be it canon or fan content) but you can block, blacklist, hit the back button, or otherwise avoid it.

Making your peace with the fact that there are things you cannot control and things you can and its better to focus on what you can control is hard, but doing so can help you be more at ease and make decisions that actively improve your experience.

Affirmative Statements

These are statements that one can repeat to themselves as reminders.

<u>My validity is not dependent on my canon compliance</u>.
- Other's expectations of me based on my identity are not my problem, but theirs.
- My worth is not based on how well I 'match' canon.
- If my friends don't respect that I am not canon compliant, they are not my friends.

<u>I cannot control what other people believe, do, or are- only what I do about it.</u>
- If someone is making me feel uncomfortable, I can block or unfollow them.
- If a community upsets me, I don't have to be in it.
- I can engage with things I do like instead of focusing on things I don't.
- Stepping away from something is always ok and its always my right to do so.
- The person I am arguing with deserves as much respect as I do.
- While I cannot undo the harm I've caused, I can work to be kinder in the future.

<u>I cannot control what happens in the canon material, only what I do about it.</u>

- The creators of the canon are making things that they want to make with publisher approval. This means sometimes things will happen that I don't like.
- Actors, animators, and other people not involved with approving of decisions within the media also cannot control what happens in canon.
- I do not have to watch, interact with, or incorporate any part of canon into my identity that I don't want to.

<u>My consumption of the source doesn't take precedence over my life.</u>

- I cannot consume my source if I do not have the health or resources to survive.
- I can ensure I can continue to enjoy the source by keeping up with life obligations.
- A relapse does not destroy the progress I have made.

<u>I can work within consensus reality while still holding my beliefs.</u>

- Even if others do not believe me, I believe me. That is enough.
- Other people believing things I don't does not change or threaten my beliefs.
- I recognize my body appears to others as a standard earth-human body, and I need to take care of it like it is human, even if it isn't.
- If I have trouble holding both my beliefs and the consensus reality at the same time, I can ask for help.

<u>I am not a bad person if my triggers are affecting my system.</u>

- I cannot control passive influence/emotional bleedover. It is not my fault if this happens accidentally.
- We can support each other in dealing with the shared response.
- I am not weak for being upset or having that upset affect the system.
- We can learn techniques to help manage my triggers in a more effective way.

Useful Self Help Links:

Free therapy worksheets are available across the internet if therapy is not an option.

Here is a small selection of self-help links we have collected:

- https://www.leehealth.org/health-and-wellness/healthy-news-blog/mental-health/are-you-addicted-to-social-media - How to tell if you are addicted to social media
- https://iocdf.org/professionals/training-institute/btti/general-attendee-info/assessments-worksheets/ - OCD assessments and worksheets

- https://www.anxietycanada.com/sites/default/files/adult_hmocd.pdf - 'Self managing your OCD at home' pdf
- http://www.imhlk.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Anger-Management-Workbook.pdf - Anger management workbook
- http://studymore.org.uk/hylw.pdf - The Hurt Yourself Less workbook
- https://www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=6d715a0e-dde5-4414-a9aa-e7abb3bb7b4b - Reducing self harm worksheet
- http://adrian.edu/uploads/files/The_Post_Traumtic_Stress_Disorder_Workbook_Fillable.pdf - PTSD workbook
- https://www.therapistaid.com/therapy-worksheets - Free therapy worksheets, has resources for a wide variety of topics and techniques
- https://mindremakeproject.org/2020/04/30/sites-with-free-therapy-worksheets-handouts/ - Therapy worksheet masterpost
- https://mentalhealthathome.org/2018/06/14/mental-health-workbooks/ - Free mental health workbooks

Final Thoughts

Its always sad when you realize something you love is hurting you, but its important to recognize it and do something constructive about it.

You deserve to not hurt. Changing your approach will be scary, but it can be extremely rewarding.

There is a way forward where you do not have to live in a state of high stress, where you do not have to hurt, and we hope to meet you there.