

Strategies for Managing Obsessive Thoughts

Acknowledge the obsessive thought and then shift

1. Mentally step back and acknowledge that you have just started to obsess.
2. Notice your emotional response to the obsession. Are you anxious? Scared? Ashamed?
3. Remind yourself that it is ok to have a momentary obsession.
4. Reassure yourself that the obsessive content is irrational.
5. Change your emotional response to the obsession by taking specific actions (i.e., writing down the obsession, singing it, changing the picture).
6. Shift your attention by practicing a brief anxiety-reducing relaxation technique (do part of a progressive muscle exercise, take a few calming breaths, etc).

Respond to the obsessive thought with positive statement(s)

- *That thought isn't helpful, and now is not the time to think about it.*
- *I can think about it later. I'm going to let it go. I don't have to pay attention to it*
- *This is irrational and I won't argue with an irrational thought.*
- *This is not an emergency - it feels threatening and urgent, but it really isn't.*
- *I can slow down and think clearly about what I need.*
- *I don't have to be perfect to be ok.*
- *I don't have to figure out this question.*
- *I know from past experience that this fear is irrational.*
- *In order to be free I have to take risks and I am willing to take this risk.*
- *It's ok that I just had that thought/image, and it doesn't mean anything.*
- *That's not my responsibility; that's not my problem.*
- *I've done the best I can.*
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Obsessive Thought Worry Time

- Set aside two "worry periods" per day of ten to fifteen minutes each.
- Spend this entire period worrying about one of your key, recurrent, obsessive worries. Don't think of any positive alternatives, and do not try to convince yourself that your worry is irrational.
- Continue to think about the same worry again and again until the worry time is over.
- Try to become as distressed as possible while worrying.

Loop Tape Practice of Obsessive Thought

- Repeatedly record the words, phrase, or statement of one of your key obsessive thoughts exactly as it spontaneously comes into your mind in a two to three-minute recording (use an app on your smartphone).
- Listen to the recording over and over again for a period of ~30 minutes per day for several days in a row.
- When you listen, attempt become as distressed as possible by the recording.