

EXERCISE: Obsessive-Thinking Checklist

In the space provided, record your repetitive distressing thought, image or memory:

Next, place a checkmark (✓) beside the statements that describe your experience with this thought, image, or memory. If a statement is irrelevant, leave it blank.

- _____ 1. *The same thought, image, or memory pops into my mind over and over again.*
- _____ 2. *It is very difficult to get the intrusive thought out of my mind.*
- _____ 3. *When I have the intrusive thought, it makes me feel more upset or distressed.*
- _____ 4. *I really don't want to have the intrusive thought.*
- _____ 5. *I've developed certain compulsive rituals to deal with the intrusive thought, like washing, checking, redoing, rereading, or reordering.*
- _____ 6. *I realize the intrusive thought is excessive or even absurd.*
- _____ 7. *I can't ignore the intrusion; it completely captures my attention.*

If you checked off several of the statements, especially numbers 1, 2, and 5, your intrusive thinking may have obsessional characteristics. The interventions presented in *The Anxious Thoughts Workbook* are effective for obsessive thinking. However, because obsessions are a particularly difficult form of intrusive thinking, you'll need extra time with the various mental-control exercises found in the workbook. If you are seeing a mental health therapist, you should mention your findings from this exercise. If you're reading the workbook on your own and you suspect you might have OCD, consider contacting a mental health expert.

EXERCISE: Thought-Feeling Record

Over the next two weeks, use this thought-feeling record to keep track of your experiences of negative thoughts and feelings. Note that thoughts can sometimes take the form of images or memories associated with your experiences of anxiety, depression, or other negative emotions. When you notice yourself having negative thoughts and feelings, briefly note the distressing situation or circumstance, and then list the associated negative feelings. Use the third column to record what you were thinking while feeling distressed, and then circle the first thought that went through your mind.

Situation	Feeling	Negative Thinking
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		

EXERCISE: Your Creative-Intrusions Diary

Over the next week or two, use this worksheet to record experiences in which a positive, creative, or inspirational idea spontaneously and unexpectedly pops into your mind. In the left-hand column, write down the situation, circumstance, or problem that you or someone you knew was facing. In the right-hand column, write down the sudden, unexpected thought or idea that enabled you to successfully deal with it.

Creative Intrusions Worksheet

Situation, Circumstance, or Problem	Creative Problem-Solving Intrusive Thought
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	

EXERCISE: Motivation Action Plan

Write down a goal that you've been unable to achieve because of low willpower (you can name the goal you described earlier in this chapter).

How have you been trying to achieve the desired goal?

What do you think you need to do to reach the desired goal?

Review your responses to the weak willpower-strategies checklist, and revise your previous ineffective motivation strategies to come up with a new list of strong motivation strategies (hint: do the opposite of what you've been doing). As a guideline, you may want to review how Emma did this. Write down your new strategies.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Once you've created your motivation action plan, it's time to put it into practice. You might want to keep the action plan handy, so you can refer to it whenever you're reminded of the desired goal.

EXERCISE: Your Mental-Intrusion Diary

Starting in the column on the left, record the type of distress and intensity of negative emotion you experienced (such as feeling sad, anxious, angry, guilty, and so on), and rate it as 1 for mild, 2 for moderate, or 3 for severe. Next, briefly describe the circumstance that led to the distress, any negative thinking you were immediately aware of, and your response, or how you dealt with the distress. From this information, deduce the initial intrusive thought, and record it in the space to the right of the table.

Mental-Intrusion Diary

Distress Rating: 1 (mild) to 3 (severe)	Circumstance	Awareness of Negative Thinking	Response	Intrusion
				1. <div></div> <div></div> <div></div>
				1. <div></div> <div></div> <div></div>
				1. <div></div> <div></div> <div></div>

EXERCISE: Interpretation-of-Significance Worksheet

Go back to your mental-intrusion diary and select an unwanted mental intrusion you identified with your distress. Write the intrusion in the space below:

Next, respond to these questions about the intrusion.

1. Do you associate a personal threat or a bad outcome with the intrusion? Describe the threat or negative consequence here:

2. Do you feel responsible for preventing this negative consequence? If so, explain how you are responsible:

3. Do you believe having the intrusive thought could have a negative effect on you or others? If so, explain how this would happen:

4. Does the intrusion seem more significant because it happens frequently and is distressing?

Answer yes or no:

5. Is it important that you suppress, or not think about, the intrusive thought? If yes, explain what might happen if you lost control of the thought:

Your answers to these five questions explain why the intrusive thought has gained such personal significance. Given its importance, can you now understand why it grabs your attention when it pops into your mind? This interpretation of significance plays a key role in causing an escalation in your distressing thoughts and feelings. We all automatically pay more attention and respond more vigorously to thoughts, images, memories, or other ideas that we consider important in our lives.

Mood-and-Control Record

Mood State (Label whether mood positive or negative; rate mood intensity from 1 = mild, 2 = moderate, 3 = strong.)	Rate Mental-Control Effort (0 = no effort, 1 = slight effort, 2 = moderate effort, 3 = strong effort)
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	

EXERCISE: The Alternative-Days Experiment

Plan to conduct the alternate-days experiment over a two-week period. Start by dividing your week into high mental-control and low mental-control days. For example, you could select Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday as low-control days and Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday as high-control days. During low-control days, devote as little attention as possible to consciously controlling your emotional thoughts and affect. During these days, allow yourself to think or feel whatever comes into your mind without consciously trying to control what you are thinking or feeling. That is, let go of your mental-control effort. Then on high-control days, work on paying close attention to your emotional thoughts, and try hard to inhibit any unwanted negative intrusive thoughts and feelings. In particular, try to distract yourself with many different ideas, thoughts, and memories, letting your mind flit from one topic to the next.

Use the next set of questions to reflect on the most important aspects of your mental-control experience. Record your responses at the end of the day in the worksheet that follows, so you can compare the effectiveness of unfocused distraction during high-control days versus the effectiveness of letting go of control on low-control days.

1. Was using unfocused distraction on high-control days more, less, or equally effective to letting go of control on low-control days? Did you have more, fewer, or an equal number of distressing thoughts and feelings on the different days?
2. Was using unfocused distraction on high-control days more stressful or frustrating than taking a more relaxed approach to mental control?
3. Was your emotional state any better on high-control days than on low-control days, or was it worse? How much better or worse? If there was little difference, is greater effort at control worth it?
4. Can you think of any other advantages or disadvantages to using unfocused distraction on high-control days?

High Mental Control vs. Letting Go of Mental Control Worksheet

Days	Effectiveness of High Mental-Control Effort	Effectiveness of Low Mental-Control Effort
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		

Did you notice any benefits to exerting greater mental control, or were the days of low mental control any better? The alternate-days experiment may seem tedious, but I hope you found it helpful in highlighting the negative effects of unfocused distraction and an excessive mental-control effort.

Mind-Wandering Record

Date	Mind-Wandering Themes	Level of Tolerance/Comfort (0 to 10 scale)
Sunday		
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		

Mindful-Acceptance Record

Day of Week	Rating of Mindful Practice (0 to 10)	Rating of Self-Acceptance (0 to 10)
Sunday		
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		

EXERCISE: Your Focused-Distraction Diary

Take a few minutes each evening to reflect on your daily experience with focused distraction. Write down the date on the worksheet, rate your experience that day with focused distraction, including the frequency of focused distraction (how often you attempted it), the distractibility level of the distractors, overall success in reducing frequency and duration of the intrusion, and overall success in reducing negative mood. Use a scale of 0 to 4, where 0 is none, 1 is minimal, 2 is somewhat, 3 is moderate, and 4 is very much.

Date	Frequency of Focused Distraction (0 to 4)	Distractibility Level of the Distractors (0 to 4)	Success in Reducing Frequency and Duration of Intrusion (0 to 4)	Success in Reducing Negative Mood (0 to 4)

EXERCISE: Thought-Postponement Checklist

Two or three times a week, go through the checklist to determine whether you've been using thought postponement correctly. Place a checkmark (✓) beside the steps that you are doing regularly. Leave blank any that require more work, so you can improve your thought postponement skills.

- _____ Acknowledge the intrusion.
- _____ Practice self-acceptance instead of self-criticalness for having the intrusion (see chapter 6).
- _____ Use the mental-intrusion diary (from chapter 3) to record the intrusion.
- _____ Remind yourself that you'll think deeply on the intrusion later.
- _____ Focus on the insignificance reinterpretation you developed for the intrusion (see chapter 4).
- _____ Return your attention to the task at hand.
- _____ If the intrusion returns, repeat the previous steps.

Thought postponement is not an effective mental-control strategy unless it's followed by imaginal exposure. Because of this, you'll want to work on both strategies simultaneously. But don't be surprised if your first attempts with thought postponement prove difficult. Like Daniel, you may need to do more work on detoxification before you can engage in thought postponement.

EXERCISE: Imaginal-Exposure Record

Complete this form at the end of each imaginal-exposure session. Write down the date, the duration of the session, and the content of the intrusive thought. Then indicate how clearly you recalled the intrusion and the average level of distress experienced during the exposure session. Use a 0 to 10 scale to rate your recall ability, where 0 is you were unable to think about the intrusion and 10 is you could think about the intrusion as clearly as when it spontaneously pops into your mind. Use a 0 to 10 scale to rate your average distress level, where 0 is you experienced no distress during the session and 10 is you were as distressed during the session as you are when the intrusion occurs spontaneously.

Date of Session	Duration of Session (minutes)	Intrusive Thought Content During Imaginal Exposure	Quality of Intrusion Recall (0 to 10)	Average Level of Distress (0 to 10)

EXERCISE: Your Positivity Journal

Record your experiences of momentary positive feeling on the worksheet. Write down the date and time, and then in the next two columns, briefly describe the circumstance in which it occurred and the main thought, image, or memory that popped into your mind when feeling happy. In the final column, describe your feelings in terms of joy, peace, contentment, pride, elation, satisfaction, love, excitement, or another word that best describes the pleasant feeling you experienced.

Date and Time	Where I Was, With Whom, Doing What	Positive Intrusive Thought, Image, or Memory	Pleasant Feeling Experienced

After you've made several entries in the positivity journal, take a few minutes to review and evaluate your journaling experience. Was it difficult to break down your positive emotion into the different categories of situations, intrusive thoughts, and feelings? Were you able to identify the positive mental intrusions that were key to your momentary happiness? As your skill at journaling improves with practice, your awareness of momentary pleasant emotion will increase.

Active-Reflection Worksheet

Date	Positive Thinking Targeted for Reflection	Outcome of Active Reflection
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

The Blessings Diary

Date	Acts of Kindness or Complimentary Comments from Others	Blessings in My Life