



MICHELLE SUZANNE SCOTT
COUNSELLING & SUPPORT SERVICES

Steps for Coping with Intrusive Thoughts

Living with anxiety/panic attacks feels scary. Biologically, it is related to our primitive fight or flight response (triggered in the amygdala). This ingrained reflex creates a chemical surge in our bodies that would have allowed us to run from a saber-toothed tiger or other perceived dangers. However, while we are going about our day-to-day activities in the 21st century the body seems to have adapted to dealing with this chemical surge by creating “intrusive thoughts”. Generally speaking, this is your mind’s way of trying to figure out and explain these uncomfortable feelings of anxiety. The thoughts don’t make any rational sense. I have researched and found one possible way of coping with these thoughts. (Michelle S. Scott, February 2014).

- Label these thoughts as “intrusive obsessive thoughts.”
- Accept and allow the thoughts into your mind, do not try to push them away.
- Breathe deeply (into your diaphragm) until your anxiety starts going down.
- Continue whatever you were doing prior to the intrusive thoughts.

Try not to:

- Push the thoughts out of your mind.
- Try to figure out what your thoughts “mean”.
- Convince yourself that you would never do what the thoughts are saying.
- Change your behaviour so that you avoid the possibility of acting on your thoughts.

Try to:

- Label your anxiety level (e.g. from 1 to 5 with 5 being worst) & watch it go up and down.
- Allow the thoughts to remain without struggling to eliminate them – they will go away on their own.
- Focus on managing your anxiety in the present – deep breathing is especially helpful.

STEPS Reprinted from: © Dr. Martin N. Seif, Clinical Psychologist, Anxiety Treatment Specialist
<http://www.drmartinseif.com/resources/intrusive-thoughts.html>)

Other resources to investigate:

www.anxietynomore.co.uk

www.webmd.com/mental-health/positive-thinking-stopping-unwanted-thoughts#

www.healthyplace.com