

A parent's guide to managing intrusive thoughts



These thoughts can be distressing
and unsettling, often leading to worry
and confusion



What are intrusive thoughts

Intrusive or irrational thoughts are unwelcome and involuntary thoughts, images or ideas that pop up in our minds, often causing distress, anxiety or unease.

Intrusive thoughts in children can manifest at a young age and in various forms, such as fears of harm coming to themselves or loved ones, worries about germs or contamination, irrational fears of specific situations or thoughts of failing or not being good enough.

How can parents help?

Parents and caregivers can support children experiencing intrusive thoughts by:

- Creating a supportive environment at home
- Demonstrating to their children that it's ok to share thoughts and feelings
- Asking their children about any thoughts that are worrying them.

The template on the next page can help you and your child address worrying thoughts.



Putting your thoughts on trial



In this exercise you will put a thought on trial by acting as the defence, prosecutor and judge to determine the accuracy of the thought.

Prosecution and defence: gather evidence in support of and against your thought. Evidence can only be used if it's a verifiable fact. No interpretations, guesses or opinions.

Judge: Come to a verdict regarding your thought. Is the thought accurate and fair? What would a new and balanced thought be?

The thought

Evidence for the thought

Evidence against the thought

The verdict

The new thought

Putting your thoughts on trial example



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The thought

I am rubbish at everything I do, I always fail.

Evidence for the thought

I failed my last test

I can't spell very well

I got detention at school for not doing home work

Evidence against the thought

I did well in science

I scored the winning goal on Saturday

I have lots of friends at school

The verdict

There is evidence for and against the thought, I am good at some things.

The new thought

There will be some things I am good at and some things I find hard.

How does this work?

Putting thoughts on trial is a Cognitive Behavioural Therapy activity focused on the examination of irrational or instructive thoughts. As a parent you can support your child to gather evidence for and against the thought. Like in a real court of law only verifiable facts are admissible as evidence. Opinions, assumptions, and conjecture are not allowed.

The idea is to develop a new thought that is balanced and realistic. So, when the intrusive or irrational thoughts pops up, your child can focus on the new balanced thought and the evidence you both have discussed.

This process encourages your child to notice unhelpful thoughts and gives them the tools to look at these thoughts objectively. Remind your child that just because they think something it doesn't mean it is true.

Thoughts are only
thoughts. They are
not you.



Thanks for reading our parent's guide to managing intrusive thoughts.

Do you need urgent help?

If someone's life is at risk call 999 or go directly to A&E.

If you need urgent help for yourself or someone else, you can:

- get advice from 111
- ask for an urgent GP appointment
- if you are in England [find a local NHS Mental Health helpline](#).

For more support from trained volunteers contact:

The [Samaritans](#) on 116 123

Or text [Shout](#) to 85258.

For more information on our counsellors, visit our [Counselling page](#).

