

Exercise

Professional Version | US English

Intrusive Thoughts, Images, And Impulses



Description

Intrusive thoughts, images, and impulses suddenly appear in consciousness and are often experienced as distressing. They are common in non-clinical populations but, when appraised as having the potential to cause harm or as being the personal responsibility of the individual, may escalate into an obsession.

Intrusive Thoughts, Images, and Impulses is a psychoeducation worksheet which allows therapists to explore with their clients the results of a study investigating the frequency of such experiences in a student population (Purdon & Clark, 1993). Clients with OCD may find it reassuring to know the frequency with which 'normal' populations experience intrusive thoughts, which may go some way to undermining unhelpful appraisals.

Instructions

This worksheet has been designed to help clients engage with their beliefs about how common intrusive thoughts, images, and impulses are. Clients can be encouraged to guess the frequency at which 'normal' groups endorse each item before discovering the 'real' answers on the second page. These facts can be used to inform therapeutic discussions about clients' beliefs regarding their own intrusions.

References

Berry, L. M., & Laskey, B. (2012). A review of obsessive intrusive thoughts in the general population. *Journal of Obsessive-Compulsive and Related Disorders*, 1(2), 125-132.

Purdon, C., & Clark, D. A. (1993). Obsessive intrusive thoughts in nonclinical subjects. Part I. Content and relation with depressive, anxious and obsessional symptoms. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 31(8), 713-720.

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Purdon, C., & Clark, D. A. (1999). Metacognition and obsessions. *Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy*, 6(2), 102-110.

Intrusive Thoughts, Images, And Impulses

Intrusive thoughts, images, and impulses pop into our minds suddenly and involuntarily. They are unwanted and difficult to control. Some people find them highly distressing and do not tell anyone because they feel afraid or ashamed, or because they fear what other people would think if they knew.

In 1993 two psychologists conducted a study in which they asked a large group of students whether they had ever experienced some specific intrusive thoughts, images and impulses. This data has since been replicated and so represents how often 'normal' people experience these intrusions.

Look through the list below and guess what percentage of the sample said they had experienced that thought, image or impulse. The answers are on the next page.

Intrusion	Women	% Men
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Driving into a window. 2. Running car off the road. 3. Hitting animals or people with car. 4. Swerving into traffic. 5. Smashing into objects. 6. Slitting wrist / throat. 7. Cutting off finger. 8. Jumping off high place. 9. Fatally pushing a stranger. 10. Fatally pushing a friend. 11. Jumping in front of a train or car. 12. Pushing a stranger in front of a train or car. 13. Pushing family in front of a train or car. 14. Hurting strangers. 15. Insulting stranger. 16. Bumping into people. 17. Insulting authority figure. 18. Insulting family. 19. Hurting family. 20. Choking family member. 21. Stabbing family member. 22. Leaving the heat/stove on & causing an accident. 23. Leaving the home unlocked & an intruder there. 24. Taps left on causing a flood. 25. Swearing in public. 26. Breaking wind in public. 27. Throwing something. 28. Causing a public scene. 29. Scratching car paint. 30. Breaking a window. 31. Wrecking something. 32. Shoplifting. 33. Grabbing money. 34. Holding up a bank. 35. Sex with an unacceptable person. 36. Sex with an authority figure. 37. Fly / blouse undone. 38. Kissing authority figure. 39. Exposing myself. 40. Acts against sexual preferences. 41. Authority figures naked. 42. Strangers naked. 43. Sex in public. 44. Disgusting sex act. 45. Catching sexually transmitted disease. 46. Contamination from doors. 41. Contamination from phones. 48. Catching a fatal disease from strangers. 49. Transmitting a fatal disease. 50. Giving everything away. 51. Removing all dust from the floor. 52. Imagining dirt in unseen places. 		

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Intrusion	Women %	Men %
1. Driving into a window.	13	16
2. Running car off the road.	64	56
3. Hitting animals or people with car.	46	54
4. Swerving into traffic.	55	52
5. Smashing into objects.	27	40
6. Slitting wrist / throat.	20	22
7. Cutting off finger.	19	16
8. Jumping off high place.	39	46
9. Fatally pushing a stranger.	17	34
10. Fatally pushing a friend.	9	22
11. Jumping in front of a train or car.	25	29
12. Pushing a stranger in front of a train or car.	8	20
13. Pushing family in front of a train or car.	5	14
14. Hurting strangers.	18	48
15. Insulting stranger.	50	59
16. Bumping into people.	37	43
17. Insulting authority figure.	34	48
18. Insulting family.	59	55
19. Hurting family.	42	50
20. Choking family member.	10	22
21. Stabbing family member.	6	11
22. Leaving the heat/stove on & causing an accident.	79	66
23. Leaving the home unlocked & an intruder there.	77	69
24. Taps left on causing a flood.	28	24
25. Swearing in public.	30	34
26. Breaking wind in public.	31	49
27. Throwing something.	28	26
28. Causing a public scene.	47	43
29. Scratching car paint.	26	43
30. Breaking a window.	26	43
31. Wrecking something.	32	33
32. Shoplifting.	27	33
33. Grabbing money.	21	39
34. Holding up a bank.	6	32
35. Sex with an unacceptable person.	48	63
36. Sex with an authority figure.	38	63
37. Fly / blouse undone.	27	40
38. Kissing authority figure.	37	44
39. Exposing myself.	9	21
40. Acts against sexual preferences.	19	20
41. Authority figures naked.	42	54
42. Strangers naked.	51	80
43. Sex in public.	49	78
44. Disgusting sex act.	43	52
45. Catching sexually transmitted disease.	60	43
46. Contamination from doors.	35	24
41. Contamination from phones.	28	18
48. Catching a fatal disease from strangers.	22	19
49. Transmitting a fatal disease.	25	17
50. Giving everything away.	52	43
51. Removing all dust from the floor.	35	24
52. Imagining dirt in unseen places.	41	29

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