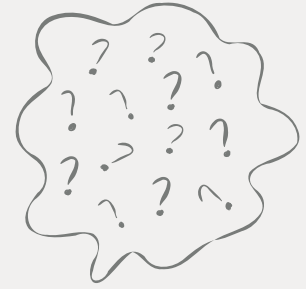


Working with intrusive thoughts in pregnancy and postpartum



Intrusive thoughts are a common part of the perinatal experience.

They often show up suddenly, feel unwanted, and can bring a lot of anxiety or distress. The more we fight them or try to push them away, the more intense and sticky they can become.

This practice helps you gently build awareness of your thoughts, and learn to sit with them — without needing to change or fix them. Over time, they start to lose their grip, and you can return to what matters most to you.

1. Build Awareness: Common Perinatal Themes

Harm to baby:

“What if I drop the baby?”

Fear of losing control:

“What if I snap and throw the baby?”

Self-doubt:

“What if I’m not cut out to be a parent?”

Sexual intrusive thoughts:

“What if I looked at the baby wrong?”

Catastrophic thoughts:

“What if I die and no one finds the baby?”

2. Write your own intrusive thought(s):

“What if ___?”

3. Ask yourself what you fear will happen:

“If I let this thought stay in my mind without fixing or avoiding it, I fear _____ will happen.”

4. Check-in with yourself, rating each of the following from 0 (not at all) to 10 (fully):

How willing am I to feel discomfort right now? ___

How present and grounded do I feel in my body? ___

How in control do I feel of my actions (even if thoughts feel chaotic)? ___

If your ratings are 5 or higher you are ready for the next step. If your ratings are below 5 ground yourself and remind yourself of your ‘why’ for changing your relationship to the intrusive thoughts and re-assess.

5. Exposure: Allowing the Intrusive Thought:

Set a timer (start even with just 30 seconds or a minute and build up to 5-10 minutes) and practice *intentionally thinking, writing, or reading the intrusive thought.*

6. Reflect:

Did your fear occur? What actually happened? Did you notice any urges to avoid, distract or reassure? How did you respond?

What can you re-orient to doing that matters to you to close out the practice?

Tips for your intrusive thought exposures

Do:

- Practice exposures several times a day
- Let discomfort rise and fall.
- Remind yourself you don’t need to solve, avoid, or explain anything.
- Bring the thought back if your mind wanders.

Avoid:

- Reassuring yourself (“I’d never do that”)
- Reframing or replacing the thought
- Trying to distract
- Praying, repeating phrases, checking feelings
- Analyzing the thought’s meaning or origins