

# Thoughts on Water



## Learning aims

To understand that:

- We all have distressing intrusive thoughts and feelings
- Thoughts are not dangerous; thinking them will not make them come true
- Thoughts and feelings come and go



## What you will need

- A visit to a bridge over a stream (alternative options also suggested)

## Instructions

- 1 Explain that we all have thousands of thoughts each day. Some are neutral, some are positive, some can be distressing.
- 2 Collect a selection of leaves and twigs (or anything which will float and be carried by the water) to represent a variety of thoughts. You could find some nicer looking ones to represent our more positive thoughts and some less pleasant looking ones to represent distressing thoughts.



- 3 Go to a bridge over a stream. Drop your collection into the river (one by one or all together, depending upon the child's preference). What happens to them?

- 4 Most will float on by and disappear out of sight. Some may get temporarily stuck and stay around for longer, but they will also move on and float away in time. Similarly, our thoughts come and go. Some may stay for longer than others but they will go. *(NB If any twigs/leaves get completely stuck, stop the analogy and explain this doesn't happen with thoughts).*



5 Either whilst you are doing the activity or after it is completed, discuss as much or little of the following as is appropriate and relevant for your child: We all have some distressing intrusive thoughts and feelings. They can be upsetting but it is important to know that having an unsettling thought about something does NOT mean that you want it to happen or that it will happen. It is just a thought or a feeling, which will pass. If you have thoughts which go against your morals and values, it can feel particularly disturbing, but having these kind of disturbing intrusive thoughts does not mean you are a bad person; in fact, it is because you are a good person that you are so distressed by them. If a thought does get stuck for a while, remind yourself that it will pass.



### Alternative activity suggestions

If you are unable to use a stream, you could try other sources of running water, such as a hose pipe on a garden slide.

Alternatively, you can do a similar activity with clouds in the sky (when weather conditions allow!).

Liken the clouds to our thoughts; for example, darker clouds could represent distressing thoughts and white fluffy clouds could represent more pleasant thoughts. Watch as the clouds move across the sky. Some will float past quickly, others may take longer, but they will all pass. In the same way, thoughts and feelings come and go. Some may take longer than others but they will all pass.

### Therapeutic relevance

Intrusive thoughts, feelings, images, sensations and urges can be highly distressing for young people. If they don't realise that we all have such thoughts, they may assume that they are a bad person for having them (particularly if the thoughts are of a disturbing nature). They may also worry that their thoughts will come true. The distress caused by such thoughts can prompt children to look for ways of reducing the discomfort they feel, which can lead onto OCD. Helping them understand that we all have such thoughts, and that they will come AND GO, can be hugely reassuring.