

Practicing Your Obsessions: The Boredom Cure

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Have you ever read a book that seemed so dry, so repetitive that you just couldn't keep your eyes open? I remember a number of years ago saying to my wife, "I have this great book on the history of Russia. I can't wait to read it". Like most things dealing with Russia it was long, complicated and had a cast of characters that would leave the ordinary mind numb. I reclined on the couch, put my feet up and began to read. A few minutes later I was snoring. We call this "chest-reading" because the book is on my chest and I am happily dreaming about the Siberian winter.

There is nothing that will turn your anxiety around like sheer boredom. [Anxiety](#) is a readiness to run away-or, if necessary, to attack. Boredom is your readiness to-well---do nothing but fall asleep. Just writing about it makes me tired.

Can Obsessions be Boring?

OK. What does this have to do with obsessions? I've been saying that you have been repeatedly using the same failed techniques with those intrusive thoughts---you've been yelling at yourself to stop them, you've been neutralizing by washing your hands (repeating prayers, checking locks-whatever). You've been thinking -ruminating - about your obsessions: "Why me? Why am I thinking these things?" We've already seen why this never works in my previous blogs, [How do Obsessive Compulsive People Think?](#) and [Those Damn Unwanted Thoughts!](#)

Your strategy has been to *get rid of those thoughts*. They're "intrusive", barging in on you. "Throw them out", you say to yourself.



In my last blog I described the "Guest House" where you invite that intrusive thought in, show some kindness, make space to let it be--- [Having a New Relationship to Your Obsessions: Welcome to the Guest House](#). I had one of my patients imagine that she was rollerblading with her intrusive thought. She pictured it as a [funny](#) clown-like figure on a skate-board zooming along with her. It was cool, she said, like she knew she wouldn't get rid of the thought, but she could take him along. These techniques allow you to make room, accept, take care of and share fun with your bothersome thoughts.

But there is another technique that you might try that allows you to inundate yourself with those miserable thoughts. Immerse yourself. Rather than reject them, you flood yourself.

This is the "boredom technique".

Imagine this. You are going to watch your favorite movie five times every day for the next week. I guarantee the outcome-if you are crazy enough to do this. You will be so bored you will either fall asleep the third time or you will start screaming. If you repeat something enough you just lose interest. Call it habituation, call it desensitization, call it defusing a thought from a feeling. Whatever. I call it "boredom".

I will never fall asleep

A technique I use for insomnia is to repeat "I will never fall asleep" hundreds of times---over and over. Try it right now. After you read this, close your eyes, repeat very, very slowly, "I will never fall asleep". Do this for ten minutes.



If you tried this, you might have noticed that your anxiety initially went up and then it gradually went down. If you stayed with it, you might have noticed your mind drifting away to other thoughts and concerns-even, "Will this really work?" or "Does this guy know what he is doing?" If you did this exercise you might have found yourself getting sleepy, having a hard time keeping a focus on those words---"I will never fall asleep". And you may have noticed yourself getting drowsy.

One patient of mine had the recurring thought that he feared, "Maybe I am [gay](#)". He wasn't, but the thought bothered him. He would avoid gay people because it triggered the thought that he might be gay. He would make himself feel macho by saying anti-gay things. But the thought kept coming back. So, I had him practice saying hundreds of times-like a zombie--- "Maybe I am gay". He got bored.

Another patient feared he had cancer. For years he was plagued with these thoughts, continually getting examinations that turned up nothing. We began with the feared thought, repeating "Maybe I have cancer". After a couple of weeks this got boring. So we replaced it with, "I definitely have cancer". This became boring. Now he was getting desperate to find something to fear. So he tried repeating, "I want to get cancer". After some initial spike in anxiety, this became boring. It was hopeless and boring. He complained, "Bob, I can't keep my mind on the words. It's so boring." Well, if you are bored you are not afraid. You're just tired of listening. You can't even pay attention to the fear. What a relief!!

I think it's time you took a nap, don't you?

To learn more about OCD and other anxiety disorders see my book, [Anxiety Free: Unravel Your Fears Before they Unravel You.](#)

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