

## Thought Suppression & Intrusive Thoughts



When we are confronted by painful thoughts or memories it is natural to want to push them away. Unfortunately, human beings are not very good at **not** thinking of something.

You can try this for yourself:

For the next 30 seconds, *try as hard as you can* not to think of a white bear.

Count how many times you think of a white bear.

You will probably find that it's quite difficult

What we know is that the more we try to not think of something, the more we end up thinking about it (we have intrusive unwanted thoughts about the thing we are trying to suppress). Worse, once we have stopped trying-not-to-think-of-something there is a tendency to think more than usual about that thing for some time after. This is called the 'rebound effect'.

This effect is even stronger when we try to suppress something emotional, and we know that people with anxiety or depression tend to find it even more difficult to suppress unwanted thoughts.