

Intrusive thoughts - Why do they persist? A tale of two brains metaphor



Here is the conscious bit of your brain. The *smart* you. The bit of you that knows where you are and what you are doing. The bit that can make plans and can decide what to have for tea. Let's call it the JUDGING BRAIN.



Here is the bit of your brain that deals with threat. It's job is to alert you to potential danger by generating and sending danger related thoughts to the JUDGING brain and anxious feelings to the body. It is not smart, it can't tell the difference between what is real and what is imagined. **It is not under direct conscious control.** It does its job quickly, but often when it doesn't need to. It has a '*better safe than sorry policy*'. Let's call it the FEAR BRAIN.

Most of the time the JUDGING and FEAR brains work fine together. The trouble is they don't exactly speak the same language all the time. What happens if they get their wires crossed?



FEAR BRAIN: *"I have just been reminded of something dangerous or awful. I know! I will generate a thought about this awful thing to warn the Judging Brain to take care. After all – better safe than sorry!"*

JUDGING BRAIN: *"Oh no! I have just had a horrible thought! This thought must mean something – **it must be true.** I need to stop having this thought or get rid of it somehow. **THIS THOUGHT IS DANGEROUS!**"*



FEAR BRAIN: *"I was right! I knew that thought was important – Well I know my job, I need to produce more of these thoughts!"*

JUDGING BRAIN: *"**NO NO!** Not more of those awful thoughts. I need to get away from them or avoid them or distract myself"*



FEAR BRAIN: *"Proved right again! Those thoughts must be very important if Judging Brain is so desperate to get away from them. I **BETTER MAKE SOME MORE**"*

JUDGING BRAIN: *"These awful thoughts won't stop! What does it say about me to have these thoughts? I must be a **bad person** to have them. It must mean I am **weak.**"*



FEAR BRAIN: *"The Judging Brain is really being affected by those thoughts, they have got to be very important indeed. I **BETTER KEEP CHURNING THEM OUT!**"*

And so the story continues... But what needs to change to make it stop?