Practical support in everyday care

When someone is caught in thoughts or worries

Understand what may be happening

Ask whether there is an unanswered question, a practical uncertainty, something the person wants to discuss, or something they would rather not discuss. Repetitive thoughts are not always ordinary worry.

Consider what can be changed

Reduce conflicting messages, unnecessary interruptions and uncertain arrangements. Identify whether a clear answer, a predictable follow-up or a change in the care process would address a real concern.

Offer practical support

Listen without immediately correcting or challenging thoughts. Help obtain accurate information, note a question for a professional, or work through one solvable concern. Explain information in manageable parts and check understanding respectfully. Build on what the person has already shared and avoid asking them to repeat their story unnecessarily.

Explore something together

If the person wishes, write down one concern they want remembered, tackle one practical task, or spend time on a familiar activity. A later conversation can be agreed where appropriate; do not use postponement to dismiss urgent needs.

Choice and safety

Do not insist on distraction, offer blanket reassurance, or attempt psychotherapy without the appropriate role and competence. Significant confusion, changes in thinking, severe distress, impaired functioning or safety concerns require appropriate assessment. Repeated reassurance may be unhelpful in some compulsive patterns, but ordinary comfort and accurate information should not be withheld automatically.

Possible invitation: “Would it help to talk, find an answer to something, or do something else together for a while?”

Evidence note: NICE CG113 and CG31 support structured clinical interventions and caution around compulsive reassurance; AHRQ guidance supports checking that healthcare information has been explained clearly; Canadian

recovery-oriented guidance supports partnership. None establishes informal distraction as treatment for rumination.