

Client Worksheet 1

When OCD Begins

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

OCD has two main components: an obsession and compulsion. The most commonly known compulsions are checking and washing, but there are many other types of compulsions that are not so easily identifiable. For example, if you had the obsession, “I might be a dangerous person,” then you might frequently *mentally* check yourself to ensure you are not harming others. So, even though it is not visible to others, mental checking is also a compulsion.

What is an Obsession?

An obsession is no more than a doubt about what is there. Often, such doubts take the form of a *remote possibility* such as a “what if . . .” question, a “might be . . .,” or a “could be . . .” For example, if you frequently check door locks, then there is a possibility or doubt in your mind that motivates you to check. Perhaps you believe that you may not have properly locked the door, so this would be the doubt or possibility we are talking about.

Compulsions Always Start with Obsessions

If you do not have the obsession, then there would be no need to do the compulsion. Likewise, if you did not have the obsession, then you would feel no anxiety or discomfort. For example, if you have the obsession “I might have left the stove on,” then you may begin to worry about all sorts of possible consequences such as the house catching fire or worrying about being responsible for a fire harming others. You would get anxious and then begin to check the stove to reassure yourself that everything is OK. But none of these actions would take place if not for the obsession.

The Consequences of the Doubt follow on from the Initial Doubt

Using the above door locking example, a worry about someone breaking into the house is *not* the primary doubt responsible for your anxiety. That is only a *consequence* of the doubt where you feel you *might* have not locked the door. Without the doubt, you would not worry about anyone breaking into the house. The worry is not where the problem starts.

Obsessional Doubts Do Not Come Out of the Blue

There may also be triggers for the doubt. For example, just walking past the door can trigger the doubt that it might not be locked. Similarly, touching a public restroom door might trigger the doubt that you might have contaminated one of your hands. You might have all sorts of reasons why you believe the doubt is reasonable enough to act upon in the form of a compulsion. So, it’s not like there is nothing that precedes or reinforces the doubt. This is an important aspect of obsessional doubt that you will learn more about in therapy.

Almost All Your Symptoms Follow from the Doubt

This is a very important point to understand. If you did not have the doubt, you would remain firmly planted in reality, that is, in the “here and now.” You would not get anxious and feel the need to do a compulsion. Thus, the doubt is the source of the problem. This is good news because once you begin to recognize and address the doubt, you will change everything that flows from it as well.

Examples

Internal or External Trigger	Obsessional Doubt	Consequences of Doubt	Anxiety / Discomfort	Compulsive Behavior
Car door	Maybe the door is not locked	If it's not locked, car will be stolen	I will be at wit's end without my car	Better go outside and check
Reading about someone going crazy and hurting their children	Maybe I could be one of those parents	If I am, I am a danger to my children	I couldn't live knowing that I hurt my children	I better hide all of the knives at home
After returning home from a social outing	Maybe I said something offensive to a friend	If I did, my friend will hold it against me	I will feel terrible knowing that I hurt a good friend's feelings	Repeatedly call friend for reassurance that their feelings are not hurt
Stack of old newspapers	Maybe there's something important that I did not read	If there is, I will later regret throwing them out	I cannot bear to think I threw away something important	I better keep old newspapers just in case I missed reading something very important

Client Worksheet 2

The Logic Behind OCD

Last week's exercises were intended to help you understand the obsessional sequence. You should now be able to identify your own doubts that lie at the core of your OCD. Being able to recognize and identify your doubt is important, since it will be addressed in many ways throughout the course of your therapy.

Reasonable Doubt

It is also important to understand that doubt does not come out of the blue. You cannot have obsessions or doubts without reason. There is a certain kind of logic and reasoning behind obsessional doubts. For example, if you doubt or worry about the possibility that you might hurt someone, be contaminated, or make a mistake, then there is a reasoning process behind these ideas. At the very least, you consider the doubt to be possible for some reason or another- because if you really considered it to be impossible, then you would not have the doubt to begin with.

Reasoning categories

Below are some of the categories that are often part of the reasoning by which most people arrive at a particular doubt.

1. Abstract facts and ideas
2. General rules
3. Hearsay
4. Personal experiences
5. It's possible

For example, if you have the doubt that you might have accidentally run over a child after driving out of the driveway, *abstract facts* might say tell you accidents do occur, *rules* that you should be careful when driving, *hearsay* that you read recently about someone driving over a child and *personal experience* that you once hit the garbage bin when driving out, and after all it is always *possible* you might have a accidently hit a child even when not seeing that you did.

OCD Sounds Pretty Reasonable!

Another example would be the doubt that a person might have been contaminated with dangerous germs. The justification behind the doubt might take the following form:

1. Germs exist. (Abstract facts)
2. Surgeons are obliged to wash their hands too. (Rules)
3. I heard of someone getting ill after visiting a bathroom. (Hearsay)
4. I once got ill after eating unwashed salad in the Caribbean. (Experience)
5. There is always a chance of anybody contracting illness. (Possibility)

The point of all this is to show you that there is reasoning behind the doubt and that doubts can present themselves in as a 'reasonable' way. This is not to say that these doubts are 'correct'. There are a number of other crucial ingredients which render your obsessional doubts invalid for different reasons. In the course of the therapy, we hope to show you why they are always false. But we are getting ahead of ourselves. For now, it is important to understand and identify the justification behind your *own* obsessional doubt.

Client Worksheet 3

The Obsessional Story

Feeling Real

Why do doubts (or obsessions) *feel* so real? To answer this question, you will first have to understand why it is that something can feel real to us in the first place. For example, take the activity that you are engaged in right now, the reading of this page. Why does it feel real to you? It feels real not only because of the information that comes through your senses but also; far more importantly, because there is a story attached to this activity with a past, present, and future.

Appealing Stories

Ask yourself, how did you come to read this page? Almost immediately a whole story will start to unfold that reads like a novel. You may see yourself in the past struggling with OCD, how you decided to seek help, your trips to the therapist office, the conversation and questions, the work you did at home, and the hope to overcome your OCD in the future.

Imagine for a moment you would be engaged in reading this page without the above story? How much would remain of your sense of reality in reading this page?

Listening to Your Own Novel

In a way, listening to your own thoughts is like reading a novel. This is not merely coincidental, but is part of how we organize our opinions and feelings about ourselves and how we experience the world around us. While we are engaged with the world around us, a story is unfolding; and we add elements to this story which makes the world around us seem real and convincing, whether you are on your way to the grocery, going to work, conversing with friends or family or obsessing. So in a way, we go through life being storytellers, and the stories we tell ourselves have an important effect on our experience, what we believe in, and how real these beliefs feel to us. In the same manner, obsessional ideas also come about and appear real to us through the stories we tell ourselves. They have a history and a story attached to them, which make them feel very plausible and real.

We're All Storytellers

Aside from all being storytellers, we also reason, and weave our stories in a generally logical and coherent way. So in the story, there are all kinds of seemingly logical and rational reasons behind the obsessional doubt. In fact, you are already quite familiar with the story behind your own obsessions and doubts. After all, in previous sessions, you have identified a lot of thoughts that appear to justify to obsessional doubt. However, all these bits and pieces of information that you have considered so far are really part of a more compelling story – the story you tell yourself when you think about why your doubt might be true. We also sometimes call it the *narrative unit* of your OCD. It is this narrative that makes the OCD feel so real.

Client Worksheet 4

The Vulnerable Self-Theme

The worksheet in this section covers:

- How to discover your vulnerable OCD self through decentering your everyday doubts around you.
- Understanding how the self-theme may dictate the type of everyday obsessions you experience.
- Understanding how the OCD is not a real self but an illusory self-arrived at on the basis of inferential confusion.
- In other words, it is a possible self you are convinced you could become and who you do not wish to become, but are convinced you could become on the basis of an absorbing story.
- Your real self is exactly the opposite of the OCD feared self you fear could become.

Looking at the doubts listed on the clinical scale, perhaps we see:

- Doubt that I checked the stove.
- Doubt that I wrote the correct number.
- Doubt that I said the right word.
- Doubt that the car door is locked properly.

Questions to Ask:

First question to ask: ‘What do the doubts share in common here?’

* *Answer:* The first obvious point in common amongst the doubts is checking to see if everything was fine.

The **second** question: ‘What does this checking action tell us about your self-construct?’

* *Answer:* The client fears that she or he may have made an error, mistake, or blunder.

The **third** question: ‘What sort of person would do this?’ introduces the self-theme.

* *Answer:* A person who is clumsy, prone to errors, inadequate or careless.

~ The self-theme is idiosyncratic and can be quite complex. It is important to cover all the options of self-themes with the client and include all components.

~ Your doubts reveal your OCD self, since you only doubt obsessively in areas where your self-theme says you would be most likely to doubt. For example, a person who is constantly checking to see if the lights in the house are off clearly considers he is a person likely to leave the lights on.

At the same time he does not constantly check whether the car is parked correctly when the client goes out to a car park, clearly does not consider it any more likely than anyone else to find the parked incorrectly.

~ The OCD self-theme plays an important part in determining the type of OCD you experience. Hence it is important to know it. In other words, the self is not a real self that you can identify with real positive attributes. It is rather a non-existent self which you are afraid you will become. Or, more precisely, you think *maybe* you could become. Rather, it's another obsessional doubt and follows all the reasoning errors that make your obsessional doubt believable.

~ Good news: you will readily identify all the imaginary and illusory tricks by which the OCD convinces you that you could become a self you fear, and don't want to be.

~ Bad news: the OCD has done a really good job of convincing you that this illusory self is a real possibility.

~ The OCD self is actually the complete opposite of who you really are, and in a later chapter we will cover how to replace the OCD feared self with the authentic self you really are.

~ Obviously, knowing and changing this theme comprise a giant step in helping you overcome your OCD. Why? Well, because if this theme makes you vulnerable to doubt in the way you do, then repositioning yourself towards a more solid self will make you far less vulnerable. You will begin to base your self-evaluation on who you really are and what you are really likely to do, not on a self that OCD says you might possibly, one day, become.

Client Worksheet 5 OCD Is 100% Imaginary

Lack of Direct Connect

One of the most important characteristics of obsessional doubts is that there is never any direct justification for the doubt in the here and now. Consider the following examples of obsessional doubts: ‘The door might be unlocked’, or ‘I might have been contaminated with something dirty’. You may have just stepped outside and locked the door, or you may have just touched a metal pole on the bus. But, was there anything in the here and now that actually justified these particular doubts? Did you actually sense anything that supported the doubt? For obsessions, the answer to this question is *always* no.

Obsessional Doubt and Reality

This is even the case for obsessions that are not entirely related to what is around you. For example, you might have an obsession such as ‘I might hit someone’ or ‘I might be a child molester’. There is no real information in the here and now that supports these doubts, not even the reality that is *inside* of you. For example, do you ever *actually* feel angry at someone when you have an obsession like, ‘I might hit someone’? Once again, if it is an obsession, the answer to this question is always no. The obsession is never supported by reality, and this includes your own *inner* reality and common sense.

In one of the cases discussed later, the distinction between obsessing about the possibility of committing an impulsive act and the real impulse to act is traced to the lack of any real identifiable intention or desire. A client who doubts their sexual orientation typically has no desire related to this doubt, only an anxious reflection on its possibility. The genuine sexual arousal all points away from the doubt.

Doubts Go Against Reality

Obsessional doubt never has anything to do with the immediate reality in the here and now. It is what makes your doubt an obsession. It is almost impossible to over-estimate the significance of this fact. It is the basis of all your symptoms.

Creative Exercises

Ask yourself the following questions for your own obsessional doubts the last time they occurred:

1. Was there any information in the here and now to justify the doubt?
2. Did the doubt go beyond objective (inner) sense information?

Reality of Doubt

You may readily agree that your doubts have no basis in reality, yet- you may also wonder why this is so important. After all, even if obsessional doubts are not always supported by ‘immediate’ reality, this does not mean they are impossible. You might feel, for example, that just the fact that you have no direct evidence for the door being unlocked does not mean it might not have been left unlocked. This is certainly true. *All manner*

of things are possible. But this is not the point. The reason why it is important that there is never any direct evidence for an obsession is because it tells us a lot about where the obsession originates from. It tells us it originates from inside of you. And because it has nothing to do with reality in the here and now, it can actually only come from your *imagination*.

Imagination

Keep in mind that we use the term ‘imagination’ here to refer to anything that does not directly relate to reality in the here and now. We know that people with OCD rely a lot on their imagination when coming to conclusions about reality. They seem to very easily come up with possibilities. And these possibilities never ever seem to directly relate to reality; including their own actual inner reality.

For example, in the case of a doubt about not having properly locked the door, this may include ideas like ‘Doors are sometimes accidentally left unlocked’, ‘Perhaps I do not remember correctly locking the door’ or ‘What if the lock broke when I was turning it?’ In the case of an obsession without overt compulsions, it may include ideas like ‘I might offend God’, ‘Did I just swear?’, ‘What if I would spit on the bible?’ or ‘What terrible things could I think of to offend God?’

Imagination and Reason

Of course, we all rely on imagination during reasoning to some extent. It surely would be a strange world to only ever have thoughts about only those things that exist in the here and now. For better or worse, imagining is a very human trait. However, what is particularly peculiar about obsessions is that they are generated on a *purely* imaginary basis. There is no direct evidence for the obsession in the here and now. It originates for a 100% from your imagination, which is exactly what makes your doubt obsessional.

Distinguishing Doubts

The difference between normal and obsessional doubt is that there is always direct evidence in the here and now for the doubt. It does not have to be a whole lot. It can be very little. But as long as there is direct evidence, then the doubt is a normal doubt. In that case, there is always *some* overlap between reality and imagination during reasoning. Such normal doubts occur with specific evidence or information for the doubt. They occur in an appropriate *context*.

For example, you may have plans to spend the next day outside, or you noticed you were running late for an appointment. Also, these doubts are quickly resolved (e.g. check the weather report, or do a simple calculation on how much longer the journey will take).

However, in obsessional doubt, it almost seems like the doubt comes out of nowhere. And it often feels like that too! Because, in reality, there is no justification for the doubt! In fact, reality and imagination are completely disconnected from each other. Imagination does one thing, while reality does the other. Perhaps, then, it is not so surprising that your obsessions so often feel like they are out of your control.

Client Worksheet 6

Doubt and Possibility

Imaginary Nature

You hopefully now agree with the fact that nothing about your obsession is supported by anything in the here and now. It originates entirely from you rather than the outside. It comes from the imagination. But what does this mean exactly? Are there any implications to this idea?

Possible Versus Probable

On the surface, the idea that there is no direct evidence for the obsession seems to make little difference. After all, people do become contaminated and ill even though there was nothing in reality to indicate that might happen. Likewise, people do forget to check whether the door is locked and their homes are broken into, often completely unexpected and without warning. So it seems that the obsession might still be possible even if there is no justification in the here and now. But that is exactly the problem with OCD! It thrives on possibility and doubt! So before saying that the obsession might still be possible even if it comes from your imagination, let's have a closer look at that argument. Does something merely being possible *really* provide a justification for anything? Does it justify your checking, washing, worrying and everything else the OCD has put on your plate?

Keep in mind that we are not debating here whether your obsessional doubt is possible or not, in the abstract. Most obsessions are indeed possible in a very abstract and generalized sense. So this is not what we are arguing here. What we are looking at right now is whether making the argument that something is possible in the here and now, is justified by an abstract or remote possibility. Or, is it impossible because it's irrelevant?

Example

Let's start with something that is really possible even if it's a small possibility. Let's say, for example, that I have an obsession about a meteor falling on my head. I constantly check the sky to ensure that nothing is falling down. The fact that there is really nothing in the here and now to support the idea that there is a meteor around doesn't convince me. I feel I have to worry about it without any sort of real justification. Here, you would probably agree that the mere possibility of a meteor landing on my head provides no real justification for me to start worrying about meteors falling down even, though it might be possible.

In Your Own Case

But how is this different from your own obsessions? You don't have any justification for your own obsession in the here and now either. The fact that your own obsession might be less of a rare occurrence than a meteor falling down makes no difference. Again, it's not about how possible something is on a chance-by-chance basis. Rather the problem is relying on possibility to begin with if there is nothing in the here and now to support the obsession.

Selectivity of Doubt

And ironically, whether you know it or not, you already agree with the idea that there has to be evidence in the here and now to take a doubt seriously. In most aspects of your life, you never just rely on possibility. For example, do you worry about a car running you over after you checked the street before crossing? You don't, because you trust what your senses are telling you. You have this trust in your own senses or self in almost every other aspect of your life that has not been affected by the OCD. You don't confuse stories that import facts and possibilities from elsewhere as though they are happening now.

Why Act Differently?

Yet, in the OCD situation, you suddenly reason and act differently. There, you believe that only the possibility that the door might be unlocked is already enough to justify you checking it. The fact that you have seen it lock seems to make no difference. Or alternatively, you might worry about being contaminated without actually seeing anything on your hands. In other words, your reasoning is very selective when it comes to OCD. For whatever reason, you do not really trust yourself in these situations.

Realizing Irrelevance

But none of this changes the fact that you can realize right now that your obsession is 100% irrelevant to the here and now. It is irrelevant since just because something *is* possible provides no justification for anything in the here and now. It is exactly the same as worrying that the ceiling might come crashing down. These things are possible, but you do not worry about them without direct evidence. It would only make sense to worry or doubt if you see sudden cracks in the wall, hear loud and strange noises above your head or something along those lines. There would be sense information in the here and now to justify the doubt; if there is sense information to support it, it would be a non-obsessional doubt.

Applying the Principle

Do not get hung up on the fact that these examples may seem a little far-fetched. If you look at it carefully, you will see that the same principle applies to your own obsessions. You treat a mere possibility as if it is a realistic probability. You can come to this realization by applying this knowledge to your own OCD. And when you fully realize that this reasoning is incorrect you can indeed completely get rid of your OCD.

You only have to apply it.

Client Worksheet 7

The OCD Bubble

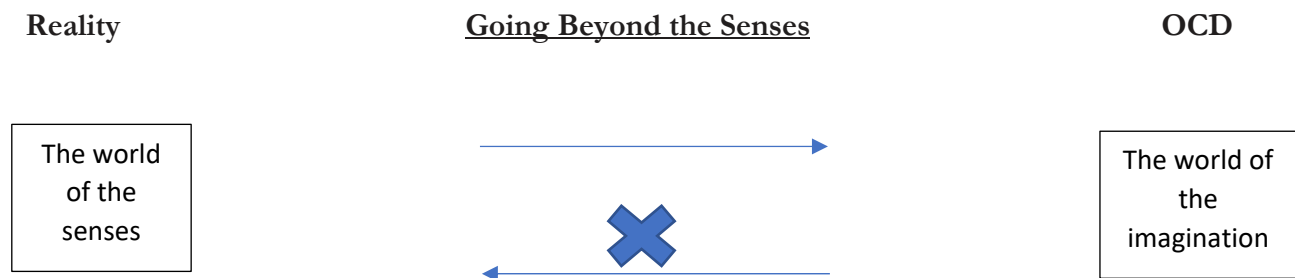
It may not seem obvious at first, but you would be surprised how much your OCD is about going beyond the senses. In fact, the *only way* for the OCD to make a convincing case is to come up with possibilities that make it seem *as if* the doubt has something to do with reality around you. More importantly, these possibilities make it seem as if reality does not really matter.

Let's say that you worry about certain dangerous germs on a particular object. Yet, there is no evidence in reality that these germs are present. It looks clean. There is no smell. The object has been used before without incident. On the basis of what reality and your senses tell you, there is nothing to worry about. Yet somehow, the OCD is able to make an obsessional doubt relevant by going *beyond* the senses:

For example:

1. Germs are too small to be seen. . . so there might still be germs on it.
2. Who knows who else has touched it. . . so there might still be germs on it.
3. People never clean enough. . . so there might still be germs on it.

All these possibilities may not necessarily be impossible, yet they do not originate from sense and common reality around you. In other words, obsessional doubt is *never* kept alive by reality, but *only* by what your imagination can come up with. And because OCD is such an *all-or-nothing* process that originates 100% from the imagination, there is an exact point in time where you enter the world of the imagination. It occurs with the first thought that you have that takes you beyond the senses. Like this:



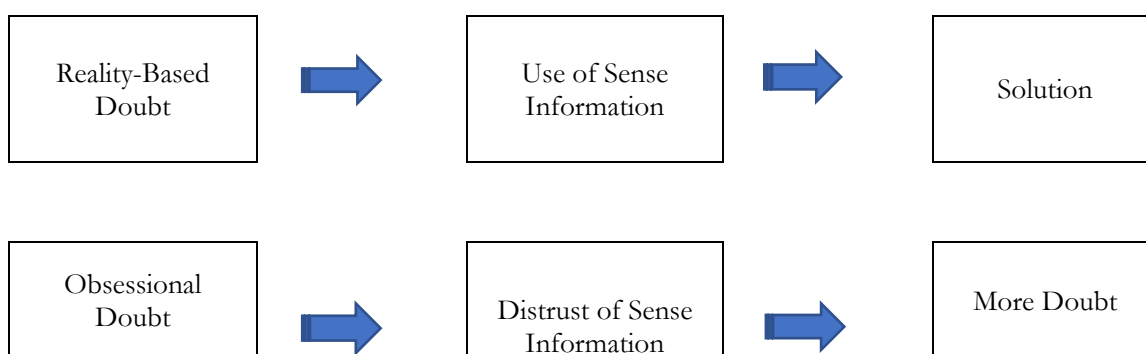
When it comes to OCD, reality and the imagination are really two separate worlds. And you are entering the imagination with that first thought that gets you beyond the senses. The worst part, however, is that as soon as you cross over into the imagination, it is very difficult to get back to the world of the senses, or reality. This is often described by people with OCD as being in a bubble, or a circle. There is this sense that you are sucked into something from where is no escape no matter how hard you try. And you are indeed sucked into something. You are sucked inside the world of the imagination – welcome to *the OCD Bubble*.

The following sections cover what the OCD Bubble is really about.

The OCD Leads You Beyond Reality into More Doubt

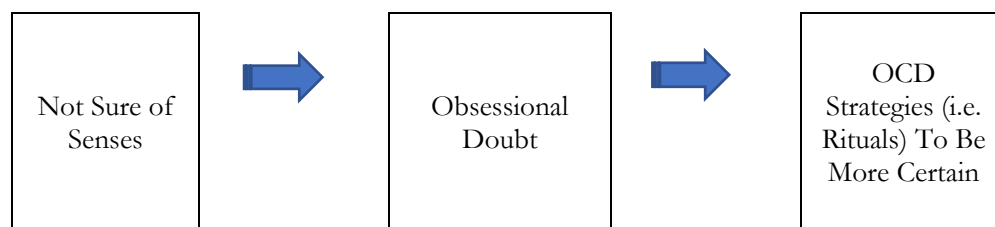
Obsessional doubts never have any direct link to reality, which means they always come from your imagination. The story leads you to believe that maybe there is something wrong in reality and that therefore you should act in reality to overcome it. But the doubt is only a story. So when you give in to the story, you are only encouraging more doubt. Which is why the more you perform the ritual, the deeper you go into OCD, the less you are in touch with reality and so the more you doubt. Ironically, in going into OCD land, you sometimes feel you are getting deeper into reality, but it's exactly the opposite: the more you go into OCD, the further away you go from reality.

The sequences are as follows:

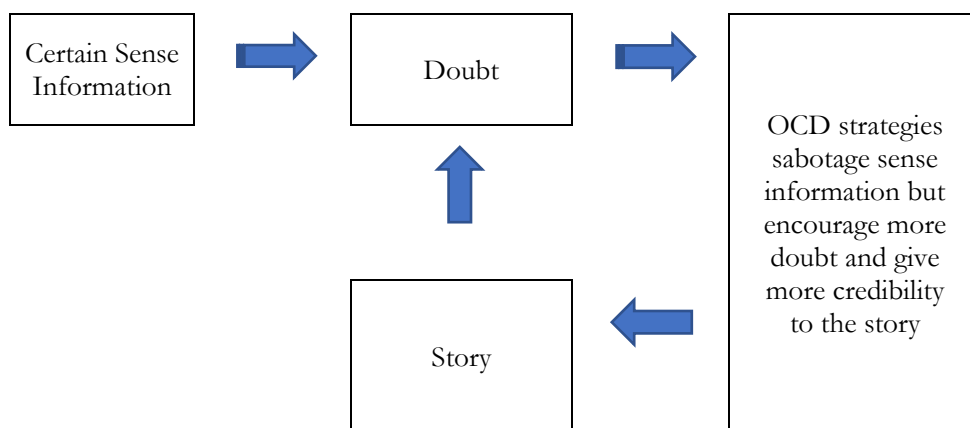


You might argue that it is exactly because you are unsure of your senses that you doubt. But our research shows it is exactly the opposite. It is only when you are certain according to your senses that the obsessional doubt then takes over and tells you *not* to be sure of your sense information. It trumps the senses and creates doubt on the basis of a good story, not on the basis of sense information.

How it seems:



How it is:



Giving in to the OCD Makes You Less Secure

OCD sabotages the very action it is supposed to make secure. First of all, people with OCD are often so caught up in the OCD Bubble that they are not aware of what is going on around them. They may not hear their baby cry. They may not notice a car looming up. They may not realize they are being pickpocketed. But OCD actions can also directly sabotage the aim of being secure. For example, testing a door several times per day will make it loose. Asking people if you said the right thing because you are afraid to upset them will eventually make them upset. Staring at a locker to make sure it is closed properly so you won't be robbed will draw the attention of thieves. Scrubbing hands to remove invisible infections will eventually destroy protective skin.

Remember that you go into the OCD spiral on the basis of a subjective doubt which is generated by a story. The more you go into OCD, the more you generate doubt, since this is the only outcome. OCD reinforces doubt so it cannot give you anything else. You think you will find a solution in continuing the questioning, but mostly you just doubt more. Sometimes a rule will let you out of the spiral. Example: 'I've done this five times' or 'I've put a lot of effort so it must be done'. But you are *never* more certain of real information than when you started the doubt; you are always *less* certain. The reason is because you were certain before the OCD doubt came along, but the OCD made you doubt your sense of certainty with its story. So now you are not focused on reality at all but on a story. So actually OCD is exposing you to more potential danger whilst you are absorbed in its story. We have met people who have ignored real dangers and been hurt because they were too absorbed in their OCD spiral.

Entering the OCD Bubble Makes You More Stressed Out

Going into the OCD Bubble is often difficult to resist for people with OCD. This is because the OCD tempts you the illusion of with providing a solution to the obsessional doubt. Everything would be so much better if only you could do the ritual and solve the problem. But that feeling is going to be very short-lived.

You will get in fact the opposite of what the OCD is promising, because giving in to the OCD is like giving in to someone shouting orders at you. Initially you feel less stressed. But one thing should be clear: doing the action does not make you less stressed, *it makes you more stressed out.*

OCD makes you more stressed because you are constantly putting in more effort than necessary and doing irrelevant actions to make yourself feel secure. But effectively, you are working overtime for nothing, and worse, all your effort is sabotaging your security. At the end of all this, you are more anxious than when you started. That's why people often end up avoiding OCD situations. It all seems so stressful. and mentally exhausting. Anticipating, preparing, all that extra attention, muscle tension: you're worn out, and yet you think OCD makes you less stressed? OCD is some con-man!

You only feel better because you have given in to a screaming bully, and if you do as the bully says he or she stops screaming for a short while, but of course in the long run- you reinforce the bully. It is for this reason that staying out of the OCD Bubble will go a long way towards your recovery from OCD.

Client Worksheet 8

Reality Sensing

Imaginary Story

So far you have learned that OCD is an imaginary story. You also know that OCD is not really relevant to reality because there is no sensory information in the here and now to support your doubts. Now we move to understand that OCD doubt is *always* false because it goes against your senses.

OCD Deconstructed

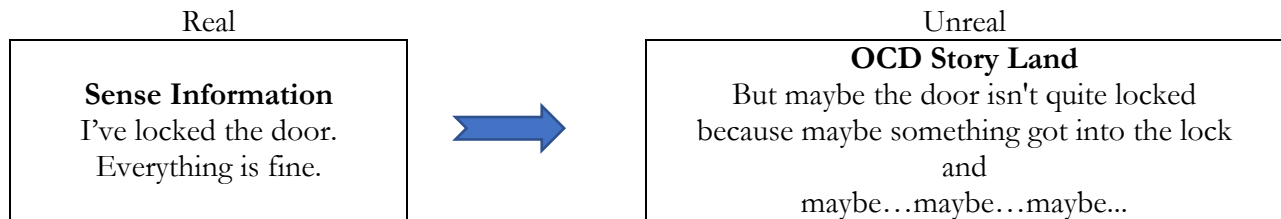
Now that sounds a bit brazen. After all, you might say, “OK, it may be imaginary and irrelevant, but even irrelevant imaginary ideas can come true, if not true by coincidence.” However, in the case of OCD, research shows that it is always false because of the way the OCD story is *constructed*. The doubting takes you away from the here and now by making you believe a story that has nothing to do with the current context. It tells you to ignore your senses. Thus, it goes *against* reality from the “get-go” and is false.

Sensing the Certain

Think about yourself in the kitchen. Your senses have already told you that there is no fire. In fact, your senses have given you *certain* information as they always do on the current state of affairs. OCD then goes against this certainty by creating an imaginary story. Since the sensory information is real because it comes from your senses, OCD must always be unreal.

The Proof

Ask yourself, how often has your OCD doubt been correct? Have you ever found real proof that your doubt was a reasonable doubt?



The doubt jumps in so quickly you don't realize that you were certain before it arrived. That is why you have been working hard on learning how to identify the cross-over point that leads you from your senses into the world of your imagination. This combined with the knowledge that there already is certainty before the doubt arrived will give you a fighting chance to manage OCD.

Feeling Certain Today?

Finding certainty is not a difficult thing to do. For example, if you have frequent obsessions about maybe having forgotten to lock the door, or perhaps whether the check you put in the envelope was not signed, do

you actually take into account what your senses have told you just a moment before? After all, you *felt* the door lock. You may even have tried to open it after locking it. This is exactly the sensory information you need to take into account. You should start as soon as you find yourself crossing over into the imagination because it clearly shows the obsessional doubt to be false and unreal.

Get Real

You may feel this situation does not apply to you. Perhaps it is because you feel there is not always sensory information around to tell you whether all is OK. It is true that the here and now it is not always about physical sense information alone. It is also about *reality* directly from the outer and inner senses. For example, if you have the obsessional doubt that you might suddenly hurt someone, then you have to ask yourself what reality tells you this is true? When did you have the thought that you might hurt someone? Does it make any sense to have this thought when you are not angry at someone or nearby? In the case of obsessional doubt, your *actual* state of mind will always completely conflict with the doubt. So, it is not always just the physical senses that make the OCD wrong, it also includes your inner reality as well – your “inner senses.”

Reality Sensing

Reality sensing is about staying with information from the here and now. This means that you will actually take notice of what is there instead of making assumptions of what is there solely on the basis of an imaginary OCD story. Instead of avoiding a situation or adding doubt to it by going off into the imagination, you will define reality by relying on information from the five senses. As you have learned so far, relying on the senses will leave no room whatsoever for obsessional doubt. When you check whether or not you left a door unlocked, does it matter whether you heard and felt it lock? Often, for people with OCD, this type of sense information is not given any attention since the OCD story has found a way around it. It is the only reality that gives a resolution to your obsessional doubt. That means learning to trust your senses again – and knowing that this is enough.

Easy Does It

Can it be so easy that all it takes is to trust the senses? Yes and no. It's easy because if you really trust your senses and common sense, then there will be no obsessional doubt. It's not so easy because trusting the senses will give you the feeling you are not doing enough. OCD has told you for a long time to do more but, even then, it may still not be enough. Doing less will leave a void and a feeling that you are not doing enough. That may produce anxiety, discomfort, or fear. Yet, you *are* doing enough if you trust the senses. And, you will end up with an entirely different conclusion from that of the obsessional doubt. There will be no doubt, there will only be certainty. Realizing that there is certainty before the doubt is exactly what the exercises for the coming week are about.

Client Worksheet 9

A Different Story

You saw earlier how OCD convinces you to doubt by creating a story. The story is made up of a sequence of reasons or justifications on why you should doubt. The strength of the argument lies largely in the fact that it is a story, not a sequence of events. The importance of viewing the argument as a story is that, as a story, it has considerable power because it does more than just state facts. It is dynamic, as it moves us along from a starting point to an end point. It's like a journey where we pass all manner of images and events on the way.

The Candid Camera

Suppose I pick up a pen and try to convince you the pen is really a secret camera. I could just state this pen is a camera and discuss the make and type of camera. This statement on its own might not be too convincing. But, suppose I relate a story about it being built in the same factory as James Bond's special car and how the developer won a prize for his work. It was tested in field trials in different situations and it was patented and is now in general use as a spy pen. All I have done here is to connect up a series of statements and observations in a sequence to make them more believable. One piece of the story piggybacks onto the next piece, and so on, until there is an accumulation of experiences supporting the idea. At this point, one begins to live in the story. The lived feeling comes from a number of elements. First, there is the dynamic aspect of "moving along" in the story. Second, there is the detail of the scenery as you go past it. The richer the scenery and the descriptive detail, the more the story is lived. There is also the feeling of being immersed in the story and a detachment from everyday life which allows the imagination free rein. You not only conjure up images and transitions as the story moves you along, but also build the scenes in your imagination and make the events seem even more vivid, personal, and meaningful. So, you become immersed or absorbed in the reality of your story. As you go off into the imagination, what at the outset might have appeared completely impossible that now appears almost logical. Let's take a ludicrous example of a flying pig with you between its trotters. It could never happen, but let's build a story....

The Flying Pig

Your friend is working for an experimental genetic laboratory where the scientists have been working for some time on mating birds and mammals. They have succeeded with rats and doves and are moving up the evolutionary scale. There have been several popular films exploring the idea of mutant humans. When you arrive at the laboratory, you find they have mated an eagle with a pig. One of the testing criteria is assessing the load the mutant animal can take and your friend asks if you would take a turn as a volunteer to be transported by the flying pig over the local town.

I'm No Good at Stories

You might say, "But I'm not too good at creating stories" or "I have no imagination." But as we have seen, you have built up and lived in an OCD story which was essentially imaginary. Now it's time to use that same imagination creatively to your advantage. In the exercises, you will find the resources to build up the story and feel the effects of immersion in that story. The exercise will allow you to understand exactly how the OCD works its convoluted magic on you.

Client Worksheet 10

Tricks of the OCD Con Artist

OCD is a con artist and a very good one and much better than a standard sales person. OCD is far more dynamic; easily adapting to new situations, using every trick in the book to make you doubt reality. Just think about it for a moment. OCD has not benefited you in any way, you feel the consequences of having OCD all the time and, yet, you are still buying its wares. OCD is a con man and a brilliant one at that.

To stand a chance against OCD, you will have to begin seeing through its tricks by identifying them and how they strengthen/reinforce your OCD. To do this, the first thing to remember is where the tricks of the OCD are located.

They are part of your own OCD story and your inner dialogue in the form of thoughts, beliefs, associations and anything else that makes you doubt. They are those ideas and thoughts that somehow give credibility to your obsessional doubt. The second thing to remember is that it is never about the *content* of these beliefs, thoughts and facts. It is about how you apply these thoughts in a situation that is not really relevant and often in contradiction to reality.

These two points are something you have already learned in the previous sessions. The new point; however, is to see how OCD is often able to get around these two facts by using all manner of tricks- which always come down to the same thing. Seeing how it always comes down to the same thing will help you expose the OCD con artist in a way that would be difficult to do if you were to debate with every little thought association and idea OCD comes up with. So, the first point is to never argue with OCD. It's much better to simply see why what it tells you is wrong and then move on to spend your time on better things.

The one thing that all of the tricks of OCD have in common is that *they make you believe its arguments have something to do with reality while they do not*. Each time you get into the OCD Bubble, OCD will have accomplished just that. For example, one of the tricks of OCD is to make you believe that you are actually going deeper into reality when listening to OCD. It may tell you that you are contaminated because, if you would just look with a microscope, it would be obvious. Likewise, it may tell you that the door may not be locked because the hidden mechanism behind the lock might be broken.

Alternatively, if you suffer from pure obsessions, OCD may tell you that even though there is no evidence that you have violent impulses, they might be there if only you would look deeper into your mind or into some hypothetical unconscious. In all of these instances, OCD makes it seem like you are going deeper into reality, when it is the opposite. Can you see how OCD is one slippery eel?

There are many tricks that OCD uses, but do not let yourself be confused. Whatever the trick, OCD will always try to convince you that your doubt has something to do with reality when it does not. Below, we have described some of the many tricks OCD uses. See if you are familiar with any of them.

Mismatching

Mismatching is a very common trick of OCD to confuse you. OCD will often propose all sorts of events that have happened elsewhere or that happened to someone else in order to make your doubt somehow more

credible in the here and now. For example, if you have obsessions about locking the door, OCD might say something like, “My friend often drives off and forgets to lock his garage door, so mine might also be unlocked.” Or, if the doubt were about being poisoned, it might say something like, “I heard about poisonous medicine one time, so my food could be poisoned.” The trick of OCD is that it uses all manner of apparently comparable events and irrelevant associations to justify the doubt. It makes it appear as if your doubt is relevant to reality.

Yet, none of these are relevant at all to the here and now. There is a *mismatch* between your own actual circumstances and these events. It is like a car salesman telling you to get rid of your old car because he had a car of the same model and it broke down. Such arguments make no sense when your car is functioning fine. Another aspect of mismatching is blending, where OCD blends OCD thinking and behavior with a sometime noble or desired, but unrelated, attribute such as being “perfect,” “ecological,” or “safe.”

Out-of-Context Facts

OCD is often very selective in how it applies information to your situation. It often comes up with facts, to give credibility to the doubt. For example, OCD might say something like “Microbes do exist,” therefore “There might be microbes infecting my hand” or “People die unexpectedly all the time so I might die now.” Such facts are often not incorrect, which is why they are so powerful in making you take the doubt seriously. However, they still do not have anything to do with reality in the here and now. While the facts themselves may be true, but as applied in your situation they are false. These facts are used by OCD entirely out of context and have nothing to do with here and now. When OCD uses out-of-context facts, it actually uses two tricks at once. Not only does it use mismatching but, at the same time, it uses facts that seem so very true. It’s one of the more powerful tricks in the arsenal of OCD because it combines two tricks at once.

Living the Fear

Another trick of OCD is that it can *simulate* reality, as if there is actually sense information in the here and now that justifies the doubt. That is because the OCD story can be so convincing that you actually begin to experience the story as if it was real. But just because you are able to imagine something does not make it real. For example, if OCD convinced you that you are ill, then you might actually start feeling nauseous and weak. Or, if OCD convinced you that you might be sexual deviant, then you might imagine being like a sexual deviant so vividly that it makes you feel like you are one. Under these circumstances, it can be difficult to tell what is real and what is not. The key to remember here is that these feelings come *after* you start to doubt and worry. They are the result of your doubt, not the cause of it. They are not real even if it seems like they are.

Going Deep

OCD is not deep even though it may present itself this way. Often, OCD tries to go beyond reality by making it seem like it is going deep into reality while, in fact, the opposite is happening. It *always* takes you away from reality. For example, as mentioned earlier, OCD might try to justify that your hands are contaminated and that there are germs on your hands by saying that if you would look with a microscope, it would be obvious that you are contaminated. But such arguments do not go deep into reality but, instead,

deeper into your imagination. So, when OCD presents something that seems deep, realize that the opposite is the case. OCD is really quite superficial.

Reverse Reasoning

Upside-down reasoning is a key trick of OCD. Normally, when we reason, we start with an observation in reality and then come to a conclusion about what is there. For example, if you see a door hinge coming loose, you might justifiably doubt that the door is locked properly. OCD often turns this reasoning completely upside down. It starts with an idea, or fact, and then comes to a conclusion about what is there. It is a bit of a bully approach where reality does not come into the picture at all. It might say, “People have walked on this floor, therefore it is dirty.” This is similar to saying, “Automobiles break down all the time, therefore mine is probably broken as well.”

Distrust of the Senses or Self

Finally, the most frequently used trick of OCD is that it makes you distrust your senses or your own self. It is the lifeblood of OCD. If you trust in your senses or your own self, OCD cannot exist. The obsession simply makes no sense if you were to take reality into account. Yet, OCD will always try to convince you that you need to leave the world of the senses behind and find resolution to a problem that is not really there.

Double Jeopardy

This is a nasty trick whereby OCD gets you not because you tried to ignore it but exactly because you obeyed it. The principle here is OCD gets you if you do and if you don't. For example, you might go back and check that the light that was switched off because OCD said it might not be off. Now you're feeling reassured because it was off (as your senses and common sense told you all the time) but that feeling often does not last long. OCD now comes back with, “Ah, it was OK before you checked it, but now after you've checked it you may have broken the switch and made it unsafe.”

Again, We Come Back to Testing it Out

A trick noted before is for OCD to provoke a testing behavior. For example, Matthew fears he may be gay. So, he finds photos of attractive guys to test himself for any physical response. OCD then says, “Aha! You must be gay for having looked at the photos.”

Let's Discuss It

Another trick is for OCD to invite you to discuss and consider your doubt as a way of resolving it. You start to doubt your common sense in the face of sensory evidence. But just as you are about to dismiss it, OCD jumps in with, “Well, we really should consider this doubt, what does it mean, how it can be resolved. Let's consider it together and ruminate about it over and over and over again.”

We alert you to all of these tricks above so that you can spot the OCD sales pitch not by trying to argue with it, but by simply seeing how its tricks make your doubts irrelevant and false.

But Maybe This Time...

Another OCD argument is, “Yes, but maybe this time the doubt is founded.” Whatever OCD has predicted in the past has never materialized. Normally this fact would be sufficient for you to have no more dealings with OCD. Afterall, if every item you bought from a shop was broken, you would probably not buy anymore. But, OCD with its trade mark “maybe” gets to you with “well maybe this time.” Since this “maybe” resembles all the other false maybes in the past, there is no reason to treat it differently.

But Maybe Later...

In a similar vein, OCD may threaten consequences not in the present but later. This distant threat poses a particular problem with obsessions where the client may be convinced that a catastrophe could befall them, not now, but weeks, months or years later. Clearly, the threat cannot be disproved by reality testing since it is in the future. However, this “maybe later” is an obsessional doubt construed in exactly the same way as other obsessional doubts and hence is equally irrelevant.

Client Worksheet 11

The Real Self

You have become familiar with the idea that OCD creates an illusionary self which it says that you might become. This is known as the feared self. As a result, your real self is marginalized by a focus on the feared self you think you could become. This feared self has led you to take all sorts of precautions and to doubt your ability and common sense because you genuinely believe OCD. But the OCD self is just another *story* about only a possibility that can be pushed aside. Now, we need to establish your real self so it can be the focus of your being. On the basis of your vulnerable self-theme, write what your OCD makes you fear you could become.

Examples:

“I fear being negligent”

“I fear being dirty”

“I fear being inferior”

The OCD Non-Self

The OCD non-self centers on who you are not. With that perception comes many negative ways of viewing the self. These include things like always comparing yourself to others to your disadvantage, never accepting positive comments, and refusing to accept that you possess any worthwhile qualities. In this worksheet, you can practice changing these ideas which will help you to build up an authentic self.

When comparing ourselves with others, it's important to learn to compare the many dimensions and to focus on the positives.

“I'm not as good as him.” → “He has some personal strengths that I do not possess and vice versa.”

“I'm not as strong as him.” → “While I may not be as strong as him physically, I have mental skills that more than make up for that.”

One-Dimensional World

We usually judge others as better on only one dimension, the person is better than me or is smarter than me. But, in reality, people are multidimensional. Everyone is unique and not limited to just one dimension. Another obstacle is continuously comparing yourself to others regarding abilities you do not possess. “I'm not good at X,” or “I do not have the talent for Y.” When you start to think negatively about yourself, it is important to counter-balance that with positive qualities that you possess. Understanding your real sense of self not only grounds you in who you really are, but also brings other benefits. You are much less likely to worry about what are more or less trivial matters. You will feel more able to accept your place in the world, feel pride in yourself, and navigate criticism and bad moments.

Real Desires

Recognizing your real self and your attributes also puts you more in touch with your real desires. You may have been living a life of embarrassment and shame because of your OCD. You may have often have felt

that your own wishes and needs were not important or could be set-aside because of a feeling that you don't deserve otherwise. Now you have a defined path to your real wants and desires in life.

Client Worksheet 12

Knowing and Doing: Moving On and Preventing Relapse

If you have followed the modules carefully, then you have likely made significant progress with your OCD and have noted changes. Now it is important for you to maintain them. Maintaining your progress is about continuing to put what you have learned into practice. Effectively, you will become your own therapist. If you have experienced a significant decrease in obsessions and compulsions, then there is a much lesser chance that you will fall back to where you were at the beginning of therapy. But, depending on where you are in your progress, you could be vulnerable to slips.

The main causes of slips are the following:

1. *Lack of focus or attention:* You are not adequately focused on applying the inference-based strategies you have learned. For example, you find yourself giving in to doubt and giving it credibility. Or, you place your focus on the back burner for later.

2. *States such as fatigue or excitement:* With fatigue, you simply become too tired or believe you are too tired to deal with the OCD at that moment. If this is the case, think back to when OCD had you working overtime to sabotage yourself. Of course, at that point, it all seemed natural and you expended the effort without thinking. Now you know that you do not need to do that anymore. It's best to prepare yourself now for fatigue by prompting yourself to deal quickly with any obsession by dismissing it immediately. As you now know, it will then just disappear quickly.

A comment about exciting states. You may be caught up in a period of excitement and not pay enough attention to dealing with your obsessional thoughts. The holidays are a good example. You are enjoying yourself and really don't want to be bothered by dealing with obsessional thoughts.

A more common reason for slippage are stress. In the OCD context, the most common stress may be any event which triggers your insecure OCD self-theme. For example, if your theme is "I could be a person who makes small errors," the pressure to perform an important job well could trigger insecurity which could trigger OCD. A number of stressors could fit the bill of eliciting insecurity. While you may have dealt with some of these trigger situations in the therapy, some situations are not foreseeable. In other words, they may jump out at you unexpectedly. Hence, the importance of reframing your self-theme. The more you are convinced that you are not the self that OCD says you are, the more you will identify with your real self. Keep in mind that OCD is always vigilant by looking out for situations where you are most vulnerable.

Inadvertent Slippage

Another word of caution concerns inadvertently slipping into OCD by default. It may be a memory of OCD which gets you thinking about it.

It is also very important to eliminate all the safety behaviors you may have had. These can be very subtle and include:

1. Keeping a look out for OCD.
2. Checking to see if OCD is there.
3. Keeping OCD on the back burner.
4. Avoiding certain information, thoughts, or topics.
5. Subtle cognitive avoidance such as deliberately not thinking of a certain subject.
6. Seeking reassurance or guidance “just to be sure.”
7. Repeating rituals very quickly.
8. Condensing the ritual into a word. For example, a client who repeats a religious phrase several times when he sees an ambulance driving by or to a phrase such as “mmm.” The same may apply to certain body movements.
9. Subtle testing behaviors.