

# 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*

<b>Internal or External Trigger</b>	<b>Obsessional Doubt</b>	<b>Consequences of Doubt</b>	<b>Anxiety / Discomfort</b>	<b>Compulsive Behavior</b>
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 Exercise Sheet 1

## When OCD Begins

### The Sequence

During the therapy session, and as explained in the accompanying worksheet, you have learned that your symptoms follow naturally from a particular doubt. The manner in which OCD evolves, and how you eventually end up at the feeling that you have to engage in compulsive behaviors, we call the 'obsessional sequence'.

### The Trigger

The obsessional sequence is usually set in motion with a trigger. This trigger can either be internal, or it can be external event. For example, if you suffer from doubts that you might hurt someone, this doubt might be triggered just by thinking about an argument you had with someone else a few days ago. Then, once the doubt has a hold on you, you may worry about the consequences, feel anxiety, and engage in some sort of compulsive behavior, such as trying to block the thought out of your mind. The trigger elicits the doubt and the OCD begins with the doubt.

### Your Own Personal Doubt Sequence

The specific obsessions and doubts of people with OCD can be very different, but the obsessional sequence is always the same. So if you are unaware of the obsessional sequence, it may be difficult to recognize yourself in other people's OCD. But by looking more closely at your own OCD, and applying it to the obsessional sequence, you will see it really is all the same. There is a trigger, a doubt, and everything else flows from there. Nothing makes this clearer than applying the obsessional sequence to your own obsessions.

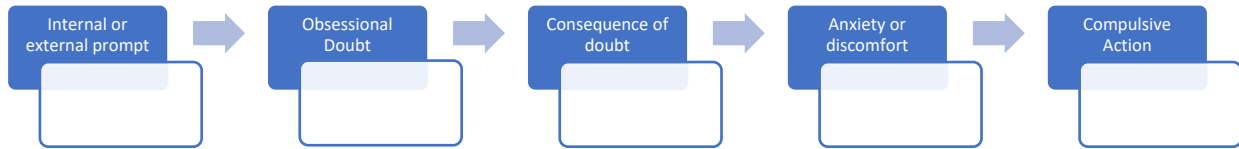
### David

Below, you find an account from a client describing his obsessional thinking. Try to identify the following:

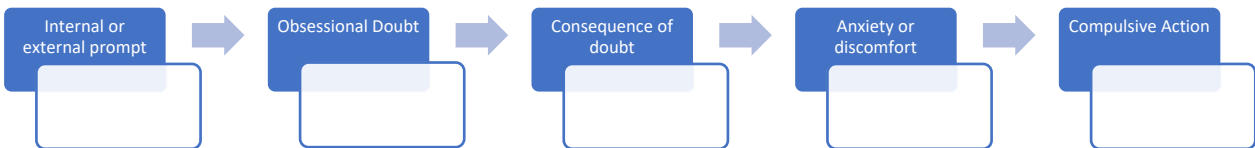
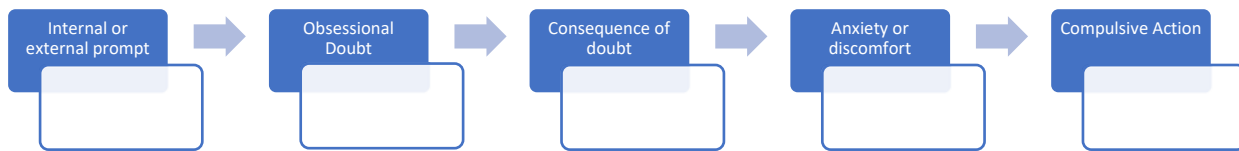
1. The trigger
2. The obsessional doubt
3. The anxiety or discomfort
4. The compulsive action

*David has recently begun to feel anxious each time he is in the car, especially when he gets out of the driveway. The problem started 2 months ago. He had read about someone killing a child on the driveway, and shortly after Dave began to wonder whether something like that could not happen to him. Dave has even begun to avoid driving his car and now often takes the bus to work. Why risk ever to be thrown in jail and having to live with killing a child? Besides, it simply takes too long to even get out of the driveway. He is jittery and has a sinking feeling in*

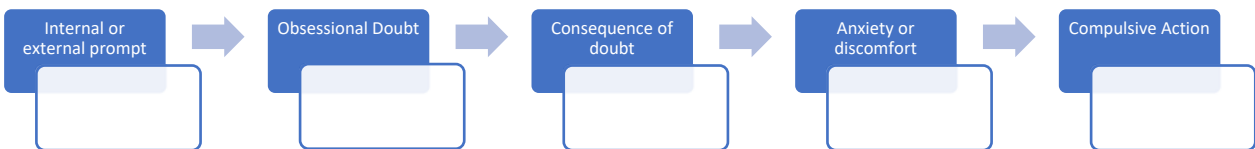
*his stomach. Each time, he would get out of the car, and check everywhere to make sure he did not hit anyone. He even checked under the car and behind the wheels, and still doubted whether he had maybe missed something.*



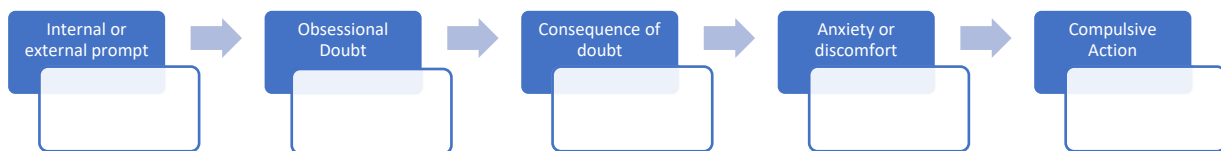
So using the form below, slowly trace out and identify the obsessional sequence for one or two obsessions that have recently been bothering you the most:



Now, do the same for an obsession with which you may have been preoccupied in the past, but that has not been bothering you for a long time:



Lastly, try to come up with an obsession that another client with OCD might have, and yet means nothing to you.



Bring the exercise sheets with you for the next session to discuss your answers with your therapist. Write down below anything you consider important about what you have learned or that you wish to comment on. Also note down any questions you have.

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## Creative Exercise

Creating doubt through doubting. During the day, think of any action you performed during the day and ask yourself, 'Did I really do that?' Keep repeating the question and reflecting on whether you really did do it properly.

### *Example 1*

You've just said goodbye to a friend on the phone, and both of you have hung up in a normal fashion. You ask yourself:

'Did I really say goodbye just now?'

'Maybe I thought I did, but it got distorted on the line.'

'Perhaps that's why he hung up. Maybe unwittingly I insulted him'. 'Maybe I've done this before without realizing'.

'How can I be absolutely sure I didn't say it?'

How is your doubt level about how you ended the call? More, less or the same?

### *Example 2*

You turn off the television set and you see the light go out. You ask yourself:

'Am I sure I'm sure I turned the TV off?'

'Maybe I didn't really turn it off.'

'Maybe it looked like it was off, but it wasn't really or it came back on?' 'Maybe I should check it just to be sure'.

How is your doubt level about turning off the TV? More, less or the same?

### *Example 3*

You've just been invited to a party by a friend. You say:

'Maybe s/he doesn't really want me there'. 'Maybe s/he felt obliged to invite me'. 'Maybe s/he is just embarrassed by me'. 'S/he could be hoping I don't turn up'.

How is your doubt level about being wanted at the party? More, less or the same?

### *Example 4*

You're thinking of a close friend or relative you really like.

1. How sure are you that you like the person? Sure or unsure? Now rehearse the following doubts.

Rehearse the following statements:

'Maybe I don't really like him/her'. 'Maybe I just think I like him/her'. 'Maybe subconsciously I hate him/her'. 'Maybe I really want him/her to do badly'.

How sure are you now that you like the person? Sure, less sure or unsure? Do you see how doubting creates more doubt? yes or no?

# **Client Training Card 1**

## **When OCD Begins**

### **Learning Points**

- A doubt is about a possibility – a thought about what ‘could be’ or ‘might be’.
- Your symptoms of OCD begin with doubt.
- Consequences, distress and compulsions logically follow from the doubt.
- Without the doubt, you would remain firmly grounded in reality without any symptoms of OCD.

### **Daily Exercise**

Over the next seven days, three times a day, when you are engaged in a compulsive activity, try to identify the obsessional sequence leading up to the activity, including the trigger, the doubt, the consequences and the anxiety.

You may find it useful to discover components by slowing down the sequence and slowing down your progression from one thought to another. Then ask yourself what would remain of the obsessional sequence if the doubt was not true. Imagine for a moment what it would be like if the doubt was false. Do not try to debate the doubt in your mind. Just ask yourself the question, ‘How much OCD would remain if the doubt was incorrect?’



## Client Quiz 1

### When OCD Begins

1. OCD begins with . . .
  - a feeling of tiredness
  - a doubt
  - seeing something wrong
  - none of the above
  
2. A doubt is about . . .
  - a need for control
  - a possibility
  - lacking confidence in life
  - none of the above
  
3. Thinking you might become contaminated and get ill is . . .
  - a sign of being ill
  - a consequence of a doubt
  - the primary thought responsible for your symptoms
  - none of the above
  
4. Without obsessional doubt . . .
  - you would not feel anxious
  - you would have no compulsions
  - you would have no other OCD symptoms
  - all of the above.
  
5. In which of the following subtypes of OCD does obsessional doubt play a crucial role?
  - Checking the stove
  - Repeatedly washing hands
  - Aligning things symmetrically
  - Harming self or others
  - Hoarding
  - All of the above