

## Client Worksheet 7

### The OCD Bubble

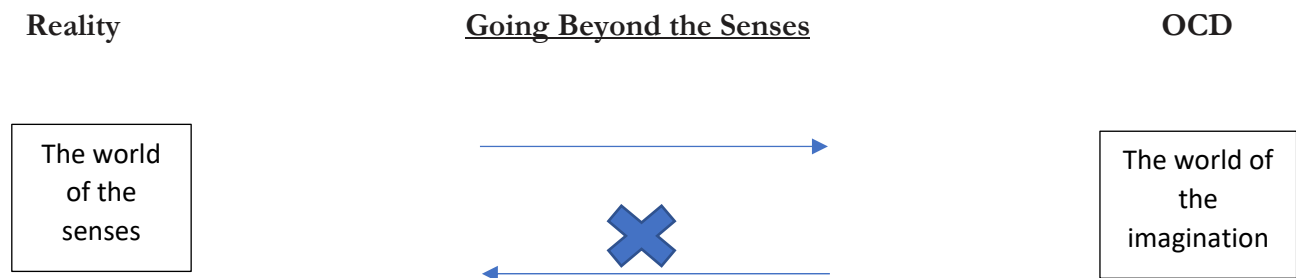
It may not seem obvious at first, but you would be surprised how much your OCD is about going beyond the senses. In fact, the *only way* for the OCD to make a convincing case is to come up with possibilities that make it seem *as if* the doubt has something to do with reality around you. More importantly,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



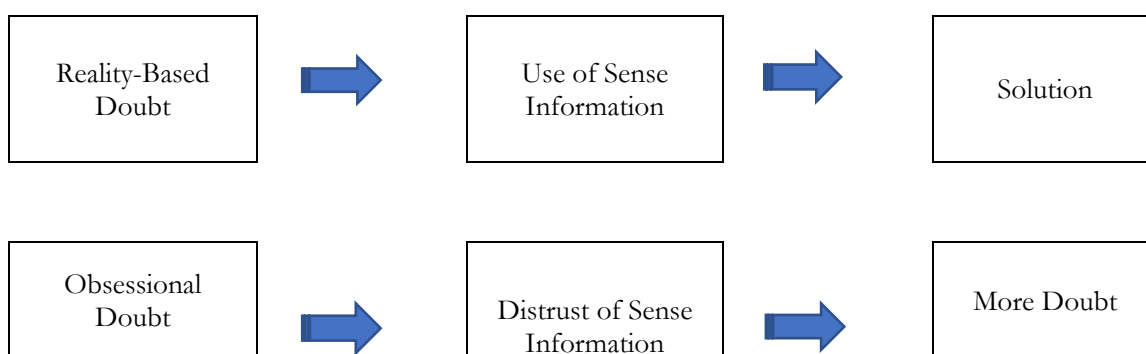
When it comes to OCD, reality and the imagination are really two separate worlds. And you are entering the imagination with that first thought that gets you beyond the senses. The worst part, however, is that as soon as you cross over into the imagination, it is very difficult to get back to the world 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

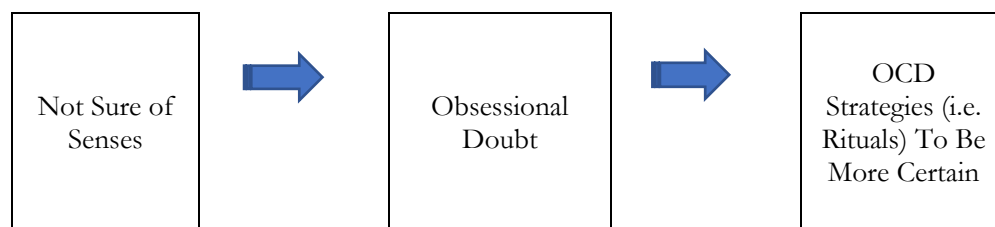
Obsessional doubts never have any direct link to reality, which means they always come from your imagination. The story leads you to believe that maybe there is something wrong in reality and that therefore you should act in reality to overcome it. But the doubt is only a story. So when you give in to 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:

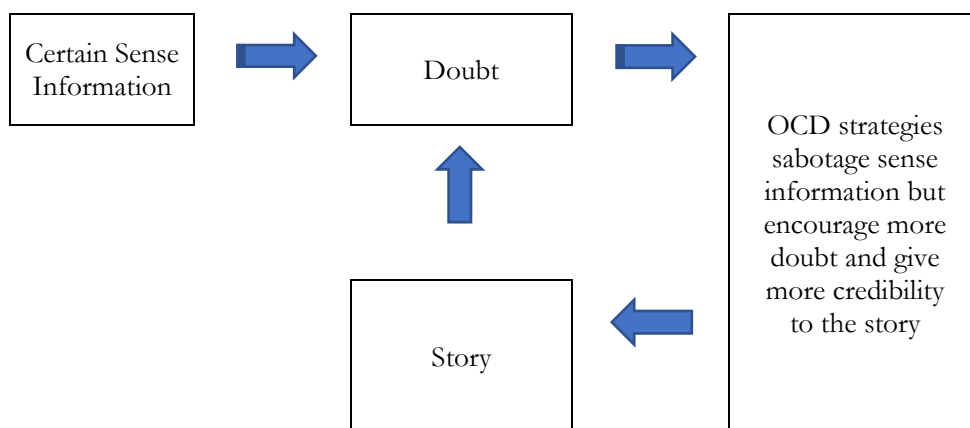


You might argue that it is exactly because you are unsure of your senses that you doubt. But our research shows it is exactly the opposite. It is only when you are certain according to your senses that the obsessional doubt then takes over and tells you *not* to be sure of your sense information. It 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 Exercise 7**

### **The OCD Bubble**

The exercise for this week is the same as the one you will find on your weekly training card. You will go through this exercise at least a couple of times each day every time an obsession occurs with the purpose to stop you from automatically falling into the OCD Bubble. You will not be asked to completely resist the OCD. But you are asked to see that there is a moment of choice before the compulsive urge arrives and that you are not completely at the mercy of the OCD.

The exercise consists of a number of different steps, which will slow the entire obsessional process down. The first step is to identify the first thought that carries you from the real world into the imagination. The second step is to slow down the process of crossing over from reality into the imagination. The third step is to hold still between the worlds of the imagination and of reality without reacting to the doubt. The final fourth step is that you will reflect on how obsessional doubt is resolved.

#### **Step 1**

You already have some practice in identifying obsessional doubts and the particular story behind them, and determining whether or not there is any direct evidence in the here and now for the doubt. Ask yourself the following questions whenever a doubt occurs:

1. What was the first thought that came to mind that took me beyond the senses?
2. How does this thought make my senses seem irrelevant?

#### **Step 2**

As soon as you have identified the particular thought that makes you cross from reality into the imagination, do not immediately react with rituals, avoidance or anything else. Hold off everything for at least one minute and try the following visualization. Imagine yourself standing in the middle of a bridge. This bridge is the thought that carries you from the world of the senses into the world of the imagination– the cross-over point. Standing on the bridge makes you feel you need to act upon the doubt. You cannot help but feel that the doubt will be resolved somehow at the other end of the bridge through carrying out a ritual, avoidance or trying to solve the problem in whatever form. However, look back for a moment into the world of the senses where you came from. Out there, the doubt was irrelevant.

There was nothing that supported the doubt to begin with. You can move into the world of OCD, think more about the doubt, try to solve it somehow and likely get more upset, or you can move back to the world of the senses where the doubt is 100% arbitrary and irrelevant. Try to hold your balance like this for at least one minute, and longer if possible.

### Step 3

Now again you can choose what to do. You can further move into the doubt with the hope that you will find some kind of resolution in the world of OCD, or you can decide that the doubt is arbitrary to begin with, and move back to the world of the senses. If you went into the OCD, ask yourself this: did you eventually stop the rituals as dictated by the whims of the OCD? Do you think the doubt is resolved permanently? Will it come back in similar situations? If you decided to move back to the world of the senses, ask yourself on what basis you decided the doubt was imaginary and not something that needed your attention. Did you use your senses in deciding whether it was imaginary? How permanent is this resolution?

### Step 4

Write down the most important thoughts that took you beyond the senses (or your ‘inner senses’), and add them to the obsessional story using the entries. Hand them over to your therapist in the next session so that he or she can help you adapt the obsessional story.

Thoughts that took me beyond reality:

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# Client Training Card 7

## The OCD Bubble

### Learning Points

- OCD takes you beyond the senses into more doubt – the OCD Bubble.
- There already is certainty before the obsessional doubt.
- OCD does not keep you safe and secure. It makes you insecure.

### Daily Exercise

*Step 1:* Identify the thoughts that you have during the day that try to take you beyond the senses. Ask yourself how this thought makes your senses seem irrelevant.

*Step 2:* Hold off every ritual and feeling associated with this thought for at least one minute. You are now at the cross-over point in between the world of the senses and that of the imagination. Look in both directions, and realize there is a choice there.

*Step 3:* Make your choice. If you went into the OCD Bubble, ask yourself later whether anything was resolved. If you move back into the world of the senses, ask yourself what was there to help you stay there.

*Step 4:* Write down the most important thoughts that took you beyond your senses. Add them to your OCD story.

## Client Quiz 7

### The OCD Bubble

1. OCD makes itself believable by...
  - making you confuse imagination with reality.
  - going beyond the senses.
  - disconnecting you from reality.
  - all of the above.
  
2. Allowing yourself to go into the OCD Bubble makes you ...
  - less secure and more unsafe.
  - feel better.
  - doubt less.
  - none of the above.
  
3. Reality-based doubt differs from obsessional doubt in that ...
  - there is a solution to it.
  - it uses sense information.
  - it will never lead to compulsive behaviors.
  - all of the above.
  
4. Being inside the OCD Bubble ...
  - makes it very difficult to resist compulsions.
  - will increase the likelihood you will end up there again.
  - is best dealt with by not going there in the first place.
  - all of the above.
  
5. In the OCD Bubble, you are ...
  - more likely to contact reality.
  - more likely to be unaware of surroundings.
  - better able to cope.
  - least exposed to risk.

Please check your answers by referring to the Quiz Answers Sheet.