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

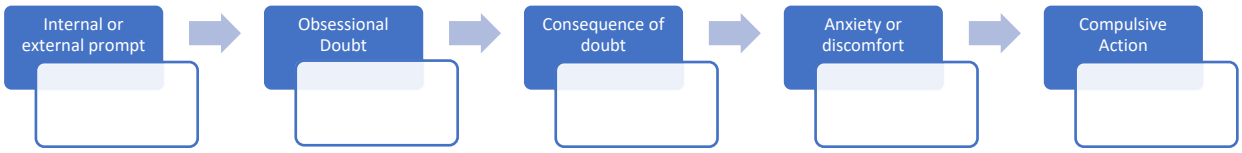
Below, you find an account from a client describing his obsessional thinking. Try to identify the following:

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

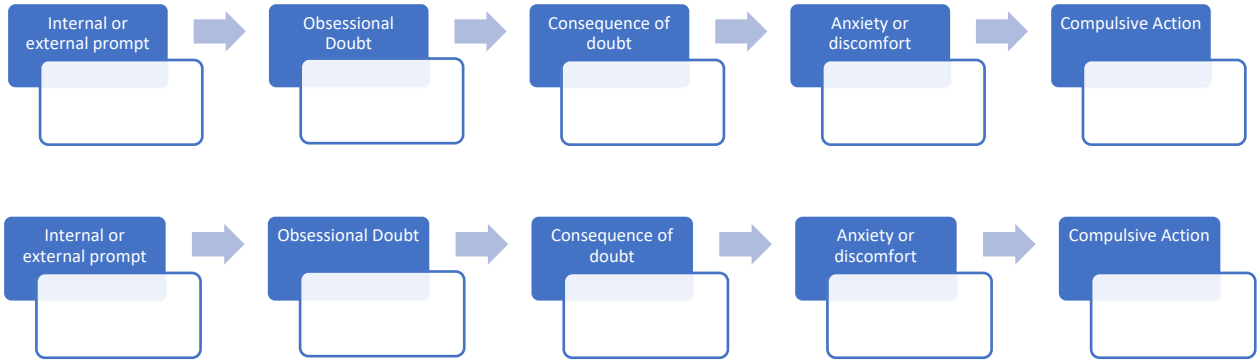
David has recently begun to feel anxious each time he is in the car, especially when he gets out of the driveway. The problem started 2 months ago. He had read about someone killing a child on the driveway, and shortly after Dave began to wonder whether something like that could not happen to him. Dave 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

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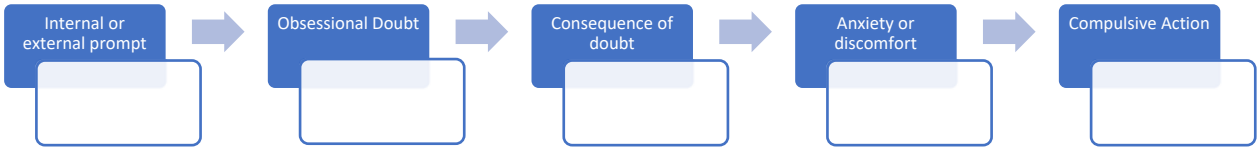
his stomach. Each time, he would get out of the car, and check everywhere to make sure he did not hit anyone. He even checked under the car and behind the wheels, and still doubted whether he had maybe missed something.



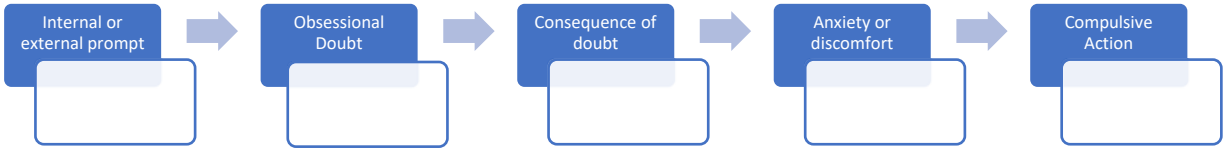
So using the form below, slowly trace out and identify the obsessional sequence for one or two obsessions that have recently been bothering you the most:



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.



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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

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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?

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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?'

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Client Exercise Sheet 2
The Logic Behind OCD

Finding Your Reason

In identifying some of the reasons behind your own obsessional doubt, keep in mind that there are *always* reasons behind a doubt. You may or may not be very familiar with those reasons. Some people with OCD for example, when asked why they believe what they do; come up with lots of reasons why the doubt might be true. Others will say that have no idea how their doubts come about and experience their doubts as extremely unlikely and even as nonsense. Yet, these two groups of people are not so different. Both groups feel that they must act upon their doubt, even though it might be experienced as unreasonable by one person and reasonable by the other. No matter if you believe your doubts are unreasonable and extremely unlikely, there are reasons why you doubt *your* particular doubt that *you* believe in. If you did not, you would not act on the doubt. There would be no obsession.

Be Reasonable

To find the reasons behind the doubt, you only need to ask yourself the question of why you think your doubt could be possible, even if only to the slightest extent. What are the reasons you think you *might* have left the door unopened? What do you do think that the papers *might* not have been placed correctly? Why do you think your hands *might* be contaminated? What is it that makes you think it is possible, even if the chances of it being true are only 0.0001%?

First, to identify the reasons behind your own doubts, write down below the two obsessional doubts that bother you the most.

1.

2.

Next, write down any justification you can think of in the corresponding category (abstract facts, hearsay, personal experience, etc.). Take your time with filling in the form, and try to write down the reasons as they occur to you while you are actually having your doubts. Let the OCD speak its mind. What does the OCD tell you?

A. Abstract facts
1.

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2.

B. Rules
1.

2.

C. Hearsay ("I've heard of….")
1.

2.

D. Personal experience
1.

2.

E. It's possible
1.

2.

F. Other reasons
1.

2.

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Example
Doubt: I could be contaminated by waves coming from mental objects.

1. Abstract facts could include 'There have been reports of nuclear factories leaking radioactivity.'
2. Rules: People in contact with metals are obliged to wear gloves.
3. Hearsay: I've heard of people suffering from metal infections.
4. Personal experience: My hands smell and feel funny after I've touched a metal object.
5. It's possible that metals give off contaminants that they haven't discovered... like with Asbestos.
6. Other reasons: hot metal glows when it's warm; heat rises and could give off toxins.

Now, put yourself in the mind of another person with OCD, and try to come up with reasons behind the following obsessional doubts:

1. I might go suddenly crazy and hit another person.

2. There might be broken glass in the meal I prepared for my children.

A. Abstract facts

1.
_____

2.
_____

B. Rules
1.
_____

2.
_____

C. Hearsay
1.
_____

2.
_____

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D. Personal experience
1.

2.

E. It's Possible
1.

2.

F. Other reasons
1.

2.

Try to compare the reasons you have come up with those of your own doubts. Are they any different, and if so, how are they different? Write down below anything you have what you have learned, wish to comment on, or that you have questions about.

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Client Training Card 2
The Logic Behind OCD

Learning Points

- Obsessional doubts do not come out of the blue.
- There is 'logic' behind obsessional doubts.
- Doubts arrive due to prior reasoning.

Daily Exercise

At least four times a day, try to identify the doubt that motivated you to carry out a compulsion or made you feel anxious, and then rephrase the doubt in the form of statement of what *could be* or *might be*. Next, identify the reasoning you have applied to justify the doubt or statement. If you are not immediately aware of any thoughts before the doubt occurred, then ask yourself "why does the doubt seem real?" Or use the categories of abstract facts, hearsay, general rules, personal experience or mere possibility to help you identify the justification behind the doubt. Remember to slow down your thinking so you dwell on the validity of each component of your thought process and how one presumption leads to another.

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Client Exercise Sheet 3
The Obsessional Story

Identifying the Story

During the last session; together with your therapist, you should have come a long way towards identifying the story behind your obsessional doubt. This story is likely to change over time, as there are likely important elements not yet included in the story. In the course of therapy, you can expect to become increasingly aware of the story behind your doubt, including all sorts of reasons that give the doubt credibility. This story will be addressed in many different ways in the course of therapy. This is why it's a good idea to start writing down your story and add new elements to it as you become aware of it.

Your Own Story

For now, write down your OCD story below. The story is composed by joining the obsessional doubt identified in module 1 and the reasoning you identified in module 2 which justifies your obsessional doubt. You can use a separate piece of paper if you need more room:

_____

_____

_____

_____

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_____

_____

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_____

This is the story behind your own personal doubt. Other people with OCD have similar convincing stories. For example, consider the following two OCD stories:

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Story 1:
I can't go too far from home, or the city that I live in, because I don't know how panicky I might get. I might go really crazy and do something to myself. Who knows what is really wrong with me? One of my family members has schizophrenia, and I might have some serious disturbance also. I could be crazy enough to cut out my tongue. When I'm anxious, I can 'see' myself doing it, using a knife to cut it off. It feels I could actually do it. Then I'll be in the middle of nowhere without help. Then when I'm found I'll be sent off to a psychiatric hospital somewhere that I don't know, and they'll lock me up.

Story 2:
I have to check my stove each time I leave my apartment because I know I am an absent-minded person and that I can forget things. It even happened once that I forgot a pot on my stove; it could have set fire to my apartment. Also, I heard that a firefighter forgot a pot on a stove right at the fire station and it set fire to the station. It is reasonable to think that if a firefighter forgets pots on stoves, it could happen to anybody and especially to those like me who tend to be absent-minded.

Relating to Stories

The degree to which you can relate to these stories probably depends on whether they lead to a similar conclusion as your own story. For example, if you yourself have doubts about contamination, then all manner of reasons that warrant the idea of the contamination story may make more sense to you, while the other story will make less sense to you. Still, in both cases, there is an equally valid story that leads up to these doubts. They are not really different, and one is not necessarily any more or less valid than the other.

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Creative Exercise

Using your creative abilities, now make up a story for a different type of OCD, one you wouldn't normally obsess about. Pick a theme from one of the following: 1) park benches are contaminated; 2) you can never be sure you really mailed a letter; 3) people could easily misunderstand you on the phone.

Illustration:
List the reasons supporting the doubt. What would happen if you wove the reasons you wrote down there into a convincing OCD story? Try to use the devices to make the story as credible and real as possible. Write the story down below:

Now, compare your own OCD story with the one you have come up with. How are the stories different? How are they similar? Write down below anything you have learned, wish to comment on or have questions about.

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Client Training Card 3
The Obsessional Story

Learning Points

- Doubt is experienced as real because there is a credible story behind it.
- Your own OCD story is no more or less valid than any other OCD story.
- The story becomes real when you act on it.
- Change the story and you change the doubt.

Daily Exercise

Invent stories both positive and negative about objects you encounter during the day, and experience how these stories change your experience and attitude towards different situations or objects (e.g., a mug). What if a person you admire handled and washed the mug before? What if you imagine it has been dropped on the floor? What if it belonged to a writer who only used it keep his pens inside? When your OCD doubts appear, stop before plunging into them and recall the story behind them, and how repeating this story convinces you of their validity.

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Client Exercise Sheet 4
The Vulnerable Self-Theme

Steps to Discovering your Theme

§ Joe doubts constantly that he has locked his car door properly. So recentering this doubt around Joe gives us: Joe believes he's the sort of person who could leave car doors unlocked.

§ Joe also needs to check several times that he closed the lights before leaving his lab at work. So recentering *this* second doubt around Joe gives us: Joe believes he's a person who could leave the light on.

§ Finally we have a third obsession where Joe becomes preoccupied that he might have forgotten some important detail of this work. So recentering this doubt gives us: Joe thinks he could be a person who leaves out important details in his work.

If we combine all three doubts to arrive at a common theme, we could say Joe is a person who thinks he could be someone who forgets to do important actions.

So look at John's series of obsessional doubts:

_____

_____

_____

_____

What do these doubts have in common? Well, they all involve John and all involve cleanliness. Anything else? What about order? Clearly John gives a lot of importance to being clean, being surrounded by an orderly environment. Assuming the doubts listed are exhaustive of John's OCD, what is he <u>not</u> obsessionally concerned about?

_____

_____

_____

_____

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Well, a number of OCD domains: making errors, hurting people and saying bad things, to name a few. So John obviously considers that he doesn't need to concern himself so much with these areas. But why not? Isn't he just as likely to experience problems in these areas? Yes, in everyday life we can encounter problems in any area.

But John doesn't obsess in these other areas. So why not? Well, the answer, according to IBT, is because his self-theme does not make him vulnerable here. John considers himself the sort of person who could become unclear or could live in an unclean, disorderly environment which he does to wish to become. His extra obsessional concern is to prevent himself becoming such a person or a person who lives in such a state. John has never actually been such a person or ever lived in such a state, but OCD has convinced him he could become such a person if he doesn't obsess about it and perform his OCD rituals. In fact, when we ask John how he lives so cleanly, he will reply because he's obsessional and spends hours cleaning. Is he right? No, he's not. The OCD *as we know* has installed doubts in his mind which make him continuously fear he hasn't done enough or isn't clean enough. But these doubts *as we know* are based on an unreasonable story full of reasoning errors. In fact, doing the rituals simply reinforces and increases the doubt that he could become the person he fears he will. So he lives in a vicious circle where doubting produces more doubt, which produces more rituals, which reinforce the doubt, and make real the real doubt seem real . . . so round' and round' the mulberry bush we go!

So where does the self-theme come from? Well, in the present, which is what concerns us here; the self is created and maintained by a story which bears all the hallmarks of an OCD doubting story. It draws on remote possibilities, abstract out-of-place facts, and irrelevant events to make a convincing justification.

John's self-story was 'Well, my father was always forgetting to wash, he wouldn't change his clothes, and you inherit your father's traits. I'd help my mother clean up and she'd say, "Don't become like your father" '.

But how did this "self" develop in the past? We're not completely sure, but research suggests that people with OCD may have a tendency to compare themselves negatively to others and ignore their own needs and self-attributes. However, the important point is that we can change all this in the here and now without the need to look back to the past. It may be in working on your self-theme, you will recognize the origin of your story in a childhood experience. If so, fine, but the goal here is not to interpret the self- world but to change it.

Now repeat this exercise with your own doubts. List doubts, and then explore a common theme.

_____

_____

_____

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So obviously you consider yourself the sort of person who also could be:

This is your OCD theme, the person you are afraid you might become:

What is the evidence for this OCD possible self? Why are you so convinced you could become such a person that you need to invest so much time and effort to make sure you do not? Obviously the con trick of the OCD is to say to you, 'It's only because you do your rituals and are ultra-vigilant that you do not become your feared self'.

So now, justify your conviction in the OCD possible self. What convinces you?

Do you see the OCD reasoning here? Compare the reasoning related to self- doubt with the reasoning about your everyday obsessional doubts.

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Client Exercise Sheet 5
OCD Is 100% 'Imaginary'

Perhaps you already intellectually accept the idea that your obsessional doubts originate 100% from the imagination. And with imagination we mean that there is *never* any direct evidence for the obsessional doubt in the here and now. It is what makes your doubt obsessional as opposed to it being a normal doubt.

For example, take the following normal doubts (or questions):

1. Will it rain tomorrow?

2. How long will the journey take?

Such normal questioning 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 (check the weather report, or do a simple calculation on how much longer the journey will take), and from a commonsense point of view you would be convinced all had been done.

Now, take the following obsessional doubts:

1. Did I shut the stove?
2. Did I read that word correctly?

If these doubts are obsessional, they will occur without specific evidence or information. You would check without having direct evidence or information that the stove was still on or that you didn't read the word correctly. The doubt would arise in a situation without having any real indication that the stove is left on. Such doubts are not so easily resolved if you do not realize there is no real evidence in the here and now for the doubts. Even if from a commonsense point of view you would know you have checked enough, the compulsive urge to check would continue.

Being able to determine whether something is a normal or obsessional doubt can make a real difference, especially with respect to your own OCD doubts. First, however, we'll put the idea into practice with some OCD stories other than your own. To do so, try to determine whether the stories written down lead into an obsessional or normal doubt. Remember, if there is no direct link to reality in the here and now, the ensuing doubt is nearly always obsessional.

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Creative Exercises

Story 1

A woman checks the front door five times on leaving to go to work and looks back several times to see if her cat has escaped. She also looks and fixates on the door when in her car for a few minutes. The cat has escaped once before in the summer when she was gardening and left the back door open. However, it has never escaped at the moment she leaves for work.

What is the doubt in the story?

_____

_____

Is this doubt obsessional? □ Yes □ No

If yes, what makes it obsessional (or non-obsessional)? Please be specific in

your answer.

_____

_____

Story 2

A pharmacist recounts the number of pills when she gets distracted during her count. She believes the recounting is justified because it's important to be careful when it comes to people's health. Yet, she never has made any mistake with counting pills. However, she did once make a mistake in labelling the bottles.

What is the doubt in the story?

_____

_____

Is this doubt obsessional? □ Yes □ No

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If yes, what makes it obsessional (or non-obsessional)? Please be specific in your answer.

_____

Story 3

A girl is preoccupied that she might unwittingly hit a passerby in the street as she walks along. This has never happened, but she often feels very angry at people. She once knocked someone down in a supermarket when someone was getting in her way all the time. It really feels to her that she could do it with even less provocation the next time.

What is the doubt in the story?

_____

_____

Is this doubt obsessional? □ Yes □ No
If yes, what makes it obsessional (or non-obsessional)? Please be specific in your answer.

_____

_____

Story 4

A man checks the clothes in his wardrobe for ants, believing ants will lay eggs and eat and destroy them like moths do. His clothes have already been eaten once by moths. He once saw an ant on the towel in the bathroom and another climbing up onto the plant. They are small and could get in and ruin anything like moths.

What is the doubt in the story?

_____

_____

Is this doubt obsessional? □ Yes □ No

If yes, what makes it obsessional (or non-obsessional)? Please be specific in your answer.

_____

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Now, let's turn to your own OCD story. You already have it written out from a previous exercise. Try to determine whether there is anything in your OCD story that has any direct link in reality. Keep in mind that even though some ideas and facts are often *about* reality, this does not mean they have a *direct* link to reality in the here and now.

Did you find any direct justification for your own doubts in the here and now?

□ Yes □ No

If yes, write down below if you found anything in your own story directly relating to reality in the here and now:

Is there anything currently not part of your OCD story that makes you feel your doubt directly relates to the here and now?

Write down below anything you have learned from this exercise or wish to comment on, or that you have questions about.

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Client Training Card 5
OCD Is 100% Imaginary

Learning Points

- Obsessional doubt comes from within you. It has nothing to do with reality.
- Obsessional doubt occurs without direct evidence in the here and now.
- The reasoning behind obsessional doubt is 100% based in the imagination.

Daily Exercise

Each time you have an obsessional doubt, ask yourself whether there is or was any direct evidence or information that justifies the doubt. If you think there might be, write it down to bring with you to the next session. Try to compare what the doubt says 'could be' with information coming from your senses, perception and common sense

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Client Exercise Sheet 6
OCD doubt is 100% irrelevant

Credibility

Sometimes people with OCD look at each other in disbelief when they hear about another person's obsessions. They can't believe that anyone would have doubts in these particular situations. Just think of an obsession you have read about before or during this treatment that made absolutely no sense to you. There are probably several you can think of which you do not find credible at all. Write down below a couple you can think of right now.

Obsessions which I do not find credible:

1. _____

2. _____

As unlikely as these obsessions may seem, they are not really different from your own. They are in fact very similar, because ALL obsessions occur without direct evidence in the here and now. In other words, your own obsessions are as irrelevant to reality as the ones you have just written down.

Seeing your Own Obsession Differently

Being able to see how your own obsession is irrelevant to reality is important. Once you do, your doubt will lose a lot of its credibility and you will feel far less need to act on it. You might even begin to look at your own obsessions with the same level of disbelief as you feel towards others' obsessions. But to be able to do so, you will need to fully understand how the OCD is able to make something incredible *seem* credible by introducing a lot of possibilities that have no direct link to reality. It is those possibilities that make it seem like the OCD has something to do with reality in the here and now.

Exercise

The exercise for this week is to pick a situation that is very neutral to you. It should have no importance to you whatsoever, and be an area in which you experience no problems. You could even pick a situation related to the obsessions you wrote down earlier. Then, once you have picked the situation, we want you to make it obsessional. That is, think of all the reasons why a particular situation might not be safe, and why a situation (that would normally be neutral when you look at it in a non-obsessional) way becomes a problem.

For example, if you were to make the neutral act of crossing the street entirely obsessional, it could look something like this:

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"It is not safe to cross the street. I heard about an accident happen to someone who was always very careful. So accidents can happen just like that whether or not you pay attention. No one takes any notice of pedestrians anymore. So now when I cross the street, I do not look twice or three times to my left or right.

Instead, I stand there for half an hour looking to see if there are any cars coming. Even if I don't see any car, one could come out from a corner suddenly. Or it might be a silent car that I cannot hear, since there are even electrical cars now. So I often decide not to cross the street. It just doesn't feel safe, even if I don't see any traffic."

Now, below- write down a different situation you picked that is ordinarily completely neutral to you:

_____

_____

Next, make this situation obsessional by introducing a lot of possibilities on why it could be dangerous or unsafe:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Creating OCD

As you can probably see, a situation that initially did not seem very believable became a lot more credible simply by introducing a lot of possibilities. Of course, it won't have such a big impact on you as your own OCD story. It was a neutral situation to you to begin with. But how would you go about disconfirming the story you just wrote down? Would you argue with the specifics of the possibilities you introduced? Or is there something else that makes the story irrelevant?

Write down below what is wrong with the story:

_____

_____

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And how does this apply to your own OCD story?

Below, write down anything you have learned from this exercise or wish to comment on, or that you have questions about.

On the basis of what you have now learned about OCD doubt and its role in obsessional sequences and behavior:

Do you see how your OCD can be resolved? □ Yes □ No

How confident are you? (0–100%)

How do you think you can best resolve your OCD?

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Client Training Card 6
OCD doubt is 100% irrelevant

Learning Points

- Obsessional doubt is completely irrelevant to reality.
- Just something being possible does not make it relevant.
- Normally when you reason, you never entertain possibilities that have no basis in reality in the here and now.

Daily Exercise

Each time you have an obsessional doubt, ask yourself whether there is or was any direct evidence or information that justifies the doubt or possibility. Next, think of an example in your daily life where you would never consider a similar possibility because it is irrelevant to the here and now. Without debating with the OCD, try to see each time how this makes the obsessional doubt irrelevant.

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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.

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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.

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Client Exercise 8
Reality Sensing

The exercise on this worksheet will help you practice everything you have learned to far. You will begin to use and trust your senses in obsessional situations. And if you trust your senses, you will have all the certainty that you need to dismiss the obsessional doubt. Do not worry that you have to be successful each time. The more you do the exercise, the more your confidence will go up, and the easier it will get over time. Again, the exercise here is the same as the one on your training card, just described in more detail. Try to do the exercise at least several times a day when an obsession occurs.

1. When an obsessions or thought occurs that takes you beyond the senses, hold still and imagine yourself between worlds – a bridge between reality and the imagination.

2. Focus your attention back to reality, and look at what is there. Only look once and take in the information of what your senses tell you. Don't put any effort into this.

3. Realize for a moment that this is all the information you need and that trying to obtain more information from elsewhere means you have already crossed into OCD land.

4. Look down from the bridge you see yourself standing on. Take note of any feeling that makes you feel you are not doing enough. It is the void that is left behind by not engaging in any rituals. It represents all the anxiety and discomfort you feel by not going into OCD land and only trusting your senses.

5. Take a moment to realize that this void is merely imaginary, and that there is certainty by remaining in the world of the senses. Try to feel that sense of certainty. It is common sense. There is absolutely no need to cross the bridge into OCD land.

6. Next, act upon the information from your senses by dismissing the obsession and not engaging in any compulsive behaviors.

There are a number of things you need to keep in mind while you are doing the exercise, which is to use the senses in a natural and effortless way. Trusting the senses means you use the senses normally, as you would do in any other situation where you have no obsessions. Anything else means you have already passed into OCD land. Of course, you can still get back, but try to avoid any of the following:

1. Staring: if you are staring, you are putting in too much effort to overcome your OCD. You are in your OCD Bubble the moment you stare.

2. Fast looking: creating ambiguity by quick looking will reinforce your imagination. Take a look as you would do... in any other situation where you have no obsessions.

3. Imposing your imagination on reality: if you can't see something clearly (for example: something in the distance that you may feel justifies the obsessional doubt), be aware that this is not 'real looking'.

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Doing this exercise often will make it progressively easier to stay out of the OCD Bubble and not act on your obsessions. You will even find that your obsessions will begin to disappear, occurring far less often and becoming less intense. And the best part is that the imaginary void will slowly disappear, as it fills up with more normal reasoning and awareness which is real. So go out there and get to know your real self!

Basic Steps to Reality Sensing

1. You intend using your senses exactly as you do in everyday non-OCD situations.

2. You will tune into the world in a natural non-effortful mindful way; open to whatever happens.

3. If you are performing an act, you decide on what criteria you will observe with your senses to know the task is accomplished.

4. If an OCD doubt appears on the horizon and tries to muscle in on the action, you dismiss it and appeal to your senses to know what is actually there or is really happening.

5. You stop the task when your senses and common sense say what needs to be done and when all is done.

Example

You shower yourself... your senses say you are clean... You do not wait and reflect on whether maybe you are clean. You leave the shower.

You lock your front door. Your senses say it's locked. You go about your business and dismiss any subsequent doubt as irrelevant.

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Client Training Card 8
Reality Sensing

Learning Points

- Obsessional doubts are wrong and false.
- Obsessional doubts conflict with reality.
- Reality sensing is staying with the information from the here and now.
- Trusting your senses will add to your confidence each and every time.

Daily Exercise

Follow this sequence:

Step 1: When a doubt or obsession occurs that takes you beyond the senses, hold still and imagine yourself between worlds – a bridge between reality and the imagination.

Step 2: Focus your attention back on reality, and look at what is there without effort.

Step 3: Look down the bridge between worlds and take note of any feeling that you might not be doing enough. It is the void left behind by not engaging in any rituals.

Step 4: Realize this void is imaginary, and that there is certainty in the world of the senses. Try to feel that ground under your feet. It is common sense.

Step 5: Act on the knowledge from your senses by dismissing the obsession and not engaging in any compulsive behaviors.

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Client Exercise 9
A Different Story

John's story about why he doubts his door is locked -

Well, I always worry about the door being properly locked. I close it very carefully; paying attention to every action. The click of the latch and the resistance of the door when I push it shut. But I still doubt if it's really closed. I think of a door I once saw swing open after the person thought they'd locked it, and well- I'm not an expert on locks and some can spring open automatically. My friend had a garage door once which just opened in the middle of the night; mind you that was an electric lock. When I test the door, it seems shut but I don't know how shut is shut. I mean how much movement is allowed? Of course, if I was robbed because I left it open, I'd feel terrible.

John's story is a good example of an OCD story justifying by the doubt. Now the first point to note is that all of the reasons given by John relate to other times and other places. None relates to what he is observing in the here and now. Obviously the story can't be relating to the here and now because his senses say all is OK in the 'here and now', but he feels justified in drawing on events he has heard about second-hand; connecting completely different events and imagining sequences. However, these all make him 'doubt' what he is actually seeing in the here and now.

Do you think John is justified in doubting because of these reasons? You might say yes because sometimes we need to rely on our 'intelligence', 'know how', or 'memory' despite the fact that these came from us, not from the outside. For example, if I've read somewhere that one area of a town I'm visiting is dangerous, I might be wise to avoid it even though I have no evidence in the 'here and now' that it is dangerous. If I know from experience that every time I leave the house with more than three accessories, I'm likely to lose one of them, it may be a good idea to take precautions even though there is nothing lost in the here and now. If I know I'm prone to slip on ice, then it might be sensible to watch out when I walk on ice, even if I've not already fallen. All these 'reasons' for caution are valid because they either based on real information from outside sources applicable to the here and now, or *I* have had direct *experience* of them in *identical* situations. The reasons do not come from second- hand information, hearsay, and invented stories.

Now let's return to John and then to the justification for your own OCD doubt. Is John's story based on facts *related* to the here and now or on justifications *remote* from the here and now? Don't forget, *relevant* means that your intelligence about what could be there is drawn from evidence, authority, or experience based directly and immediately on the current case.

Try this exercise. Say which of the following statements is based on the *direct evidence* that 'maybe the door is locked because . . .'

1. 'This lock is old and sometimes jams and fails (in reality) to lock the door'.
2. 'I read about someone who left the door open'.
3. 'It could be a statistical probability that I leave the door open'.

Which one justifies the doubt in the here and now?

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'Maybe the door knob is contaminated because . . .'

4. 'Microbes exist, so my hands could be contaminated'.
5. 'I touched a knob which I saw had mud on it'.
6. 'It's common knowledge you can catch germs from other people'.

Again, which one justifies the doubt in the here and now?

The correct answers are 1 and 5 only. Were your answers correct?

So let's try building up your alternative story along the bridging game lines. First we start with your sense observation. I see the car door locked. I know it's locked because my senses say so, and whenever I lock it I always do so correctly. It's a good door lock, it's never been faulty and there's no reason to think it's faulty now. So I'm going to shop, and when I come back it will be locked. How do you feel now about your doubt?

OK. Now return to the story and fill in even more detail, for example: I remember how the door stayed locked even in cold weather, and when I hit a bump I can't remember the lock ever jumping open. For it to not to be locked after I locked it, there would need to be some major unheard-of problem. How do you feel now about the initial doubt?

Just to be sure, go back one more time and try to add in any other details you may remember which could enrich and add density to the story. Remember that the elements can be from experience, common sense or realistic conclusions.

So now note down your own final detailed alternative story:

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It's the Way You Tell 'Em

Other elements which can help you tell a good story include:

- Richness in detail: Part of the immersion comes from absorption in details of the story. The richer and more nuanced the details, the more credible.
- Smooth transport: The second is the transporting nature of stories which seem to take you along with them on a journey. All stories travel from A to B on a seemingly credible route.
- You are along for the ride: The third element is that you are in the stories. It's not just a third person narration like listening to a audio-book read by a famous actor.
- It's personal: A fourth element is the personalization of the happenings around you and that the key transition points are dramatic and meaningful and touch you emotionally.
- Imagination: A fifth point is the use of the imagination where, of course, anything can happen and very powerfully.

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Client Training Card 9
A Different Story

Learning Points

- We all create stories about our lives and ourselves.
- These stories are convincing and rich in detail, the more they are lived in.
- Stories can transport our feelings and beliefs.
- Stories define who we are and where we are going.
- Changing our stories changes how we live in our world.

Practice Card

- Be aware more and more during the day when you are telling and relying on stories.
- In particular, it's important to be aware of stories about the self some of which they not be factual and therefore not true.
- If the OCD story comes along, catch it as it leaves reality, wind it back to the start and change its detail point by point by replacing the OCD argument with an opposite counter-point. Reinforce your alternative arguments with a fact or observation derived from reality. If necessary expand on the alternative story by adding bits which lead to an alternative conclusion. Finally, rehearse the alternative story . . . as a story. Measure the effect the story has on the credibility of the OCD story and how much you believe it is a story, not a fact.

Monitoring story credibility

After you've rehearsed your alternative story, please note the following scores 0-10 (where 0= not at all true and 10= definitely true)

I believe my OCD story is a fact ? _____

I believe in spite of all these exercises that my OCD story is the most credible story? _____

I realize my OCD story is just a story like any other? _____

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Client Exercise 10
Tricks of the OCD Con Artist

The goal of this week's exercise is to learn how to better identify and counter the tricks and cheats of the OCD. Remember, you never argue with the OCD. Rather than analyzing the relative merits of an OCD argument better to see how the argument is flawed right from the start. It is never about there being a small likelihood that the arguments for the doubt may be correct, but the particular way this doubt comes about. That is, the obsessional story takes you away from reality, which makes the OCD always irrelevant and false even if it is possible in a very abstract sense. If you still have problems with this idea, then you will need to address this issue with your therapist.

Now, take out your OCD story, and write down each sentence or partial sentence in your story. Each of those sentences contain a specific trick or cheat the OCD uses to convince you it is real. Next, using the accompanying worksheet, write down which of the tricks or cheats apply to each sentence in your story. First write down the trick or cheat that best applies. Often, other tricks and cheats will apply as well, which you can write down as second or third.

To make this a bit easier, first look at the following example given previously of someone who thinks her hands could be dirty and so she must wash her hands:

Example 1

So, I say to myself: "Well, my kids were playing outside and I know it's dirty outside. I've seen the dirt on the pavement and I think they may have touched something dirty."

Selective out-of-context facts (over-reliance as possibility)

"They picked up something from the street and, if they are dirty, then I'm going to be dirty, too."

Mismatching (category error)

"And, I'm going to make the house dirty. I imagine the house dirty and my dirty hands, so I start to feel dirty."

Absorption in the imagination (living the fearful consequences)

"So, I go and wash my hands and I can't stop washing. It's like a voice in my head saying over and over again, you're dirty, even though I'm washing and see nothing dirty on my hands."

How quickly were you able to dismiss the different elements in this contamination story? Were you able to see how each of the tricks of OCD apply here? If this OCD story is different from your own, then it should be easier to dismiss it as irrelevant.

This is what you are striving for with your own OCD story. Try to do the same thing and write down each of the tricks that apply to the different elements in your own OCD story.

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In addition, the exercise on your training card focuses on real-life situations where you find yourself having a doubt. Each time an obsession or doubt occurs, you will be asked to (1) uncover the trick of underlying the doubt, (2) see how this trick makes the doubt irrelevant and wrong, (3) remember your alternative non-OCD story to replace the obsessional doubt, and (4) dismiss the doubt. The whole exercise should last no longer than 1–2 minutes each time. Don't forget that OCD will want you to think it over one more time or two more times….three….but it will never be enough. If you find yourself doing that, then OCD has already lured you into OCD land with yet another trick. Eventually, however, you will be able to see all of the tricks, at which point OCD will give up all together.

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Client Training Card 10
Tricks of the OCD Con Artist

Learning Points

OCD uses its tricks to make it *appear* that your obsession has something do with reality when, in fact, it only takes you further away from reality.

The tricks of OCD include *mismatching, living the fear, out of context facts, reverse reasoning, double jeopardy, testing it out, going deep, and a distrust of the senses (or self).*

Your non-obsessional story brings you closer to what is really there since it is in accord with reality.

Seeing through the tricks of the OCD con artist will make the OCD disappear.

Daily Exercise

- Each time an obsessional doubt occurs, identify the specific OCD trick that gave rise to the doubt.
- Realize how this trick makes the doubt false and irrelevant.
- Imagine vividly how the situation would feel if the non-OCD story applies.
- Let go of the obsessional doubt after you develop the non-OCD story. The non-OCD story is the only thing that is real.

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Client Exercise 11
The Real Self

Note a series of everyday actions you performed today:

Now can you recenter the actions to infer the quality each of these actions requires:

So, putting all these attributes together . . . *who are you*?

Feeling Who you are

There are a number of sources we refer to in order to know who we are. Obviously, ourselves and our observations of our performance in activities are two sources. But, as we noted previously, knowing and recognizing our real feelings are other sources as well. OCD is very good at convincing you to not trust your senses. You can end up doubting if you really feel an urge to do something or not. This is because the doubt intercedes and disrupts the line of communication. An important part of knowing who you are is accepting your feelings and desires. This means you need to recognize when you have a real intention, inclination and desire for something. Avoid reflecting on what you might or could have felt. Your real desires are you- not OCD, in the same way you now know that your real activities and accomplishments are you, not OCD.

Exercise

Whenever you are doing an action, slow down and identify your real feeling and desire in that situation.

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How does this real desire, intention, or feeling correspond with what OCD says you might be?

Write an autobiography of yourself emphasizing your accomplishments and positive achievements in life. (Try to write about 500 words)

Think what you would need to have done to become your OCD feared self.

Is there any chance of you really being your OCD feared self?

The Self and Others

Another source of reference as to who you are is other people. But here you must be specific in your questions. Ask your partner or your best friend what are your qualities. You can prompt them if you wish with suggestions. But, usually, they will volunteer traits on their own. After all, if the two of you are friends, they must see something in you that they like. There will probably be a tendency for them to be on the kind side, so you must ask several sources and ask for examples to back up the traits.

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How do these observed traits match up with the OCD self?

Finally, it is important to list your own dearly held values and principles in life. It's true that we don't always live up to our ideals. But they constitute a part of ourselves and our understanding of who we really are.

My values are… (e.g., honesty):

My goals in life are… (e.g., to be a good friend):

Principles that I try to live by are… (e.g., respect for other people):

Now, compare how these qualities relate to what OCD would say you are capable of:

Viewing yourself in a non-distorted mirror, what are your strong points?

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What do others say about your particular unique qualities?

For what situations, activities, or tasks do others thank or congratulate you?

At home:

At work:

In personal relationships:

Combining all three situations above, you can say that you possess the following positive qualities:

A Varied Life

I fulfil a number of roles in life:

Fulfilling these roles makes me proud of myself:

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In the past, I have overcome a number of challenges due to my abilities:

In the future, I can see myself continuing to cope and accomplish what I wish:

This is my real (non-OCD) self and I am proud. I have the right to be respected as the person I really am.

It is important you receive feedback from friends and from yourself reinforcing your newfound real self. This means literally going out and being yourself and observing and accepting the benefits. It is important that you make time to do activities that you enjoy and carry out activities which interest you and stimulate you. Not only do these activities give you pleasure, but they also will reward you and increase your self-confidence. If your self-confidence is high, this weakens the hold of the OCD self and helps to ensure your complete recovery.

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Client Practice Card 11
The Real Self

Learning Points

Your OCD self is the opposite of your real self.

o Focusing your actions around your real self grounds you in the here and now.
o The OCD self hides who you really are behind a mask that has scared you into believing you might be something different.

Practical Card

o Whenever you carry out an activity or receive a compliment, ask yourself, "What does this say about me, my real authentic self"?
o It may say you are competent or resourceful or at least capable. By contrast, OCD said that you were the opposite.
o So now compare your true attributes as you and others visibly recognize them with your old OCD theme.
o Note the contradictions.

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Client Exercise 12
Knowing and Doing: Moving On and Preventing Relapse

o The best way to maintain the gains you have made in your therapy is to continue to put into practice the coping strategies you have learned.
o It is important that you recognize the progress you have made.
o How much improvement have you shown?
o If you have reached this stage, you will have gained a lot of insight and will have changed quite a bit of your way of thinking and behaving.
o What points specifically have you learned and which have particularly helped you?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Preventing Relapse

1. Identify future possible high-risk situations, events, or activities in your life.
2. Run through the sequence of how these could occur: trigger - doubt – emotion - ritual.
3. Rehearse stopping before you cross the bridge into your imagination.
4. Be sure to label the doubt as obsessional doubt and hence invalid.
5. In general, it is helpful to label characteristics of the situations likely to trigger the doubt as ones that touch the insecurity related to your theme. If your vulnerable self-theme says "I could be a bad, worthless person," then you may be more susceptible to events which seem to elicit this theme.
6. Three questions to ask to help identify OCD doubt: (a) Does it reflect my theme? (b) Is it a doubt? (c) Do I experience that old OCD feeling? If the answer to all three is yes, then it's OCD doubt that should be dismissed.

If You Do Slip Up

1. If you find you have slipped into an OCD doubt, do not panic. This slip does not mean you have relapsed. On the contrary, you cannot unlearn your gains so easily. The slip may simply be part of the ups and downs of the learning curve and it will be helpful in the long run if we turn it into a learning experience.
2. Retrace your steps. See where you went into OCD and that is where you crossed over into OCD land.
3. What was particular about your state of mind or activity at that point? Were you stressed, preoccupied, insecure, tired, etc.?
4. Identify precisely the reasons you think OCD was able to grab you at this point. Please record the reasons for future reference:

_____

_____

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5. How you can prevent OCD from grabbing you again: (a) Be aware of the trigger; (b) Rehearse resisting OCD at this point; (c) Imagine moving on past the trigger in non-OCD fashion; (d) Rehearse the solution until you feel you have mastered this OCD slip up.

Ask yourself:

- Are there any other similar situations you need to consider?
- How confident do you feel now in dealing with this slip on a scale of 0-100%?
- If the confidence is less than 80%, please repeat the above steps (a through d).

Dealing with Remaining OCD Elements

- You may still be experiencing past emotional reactions. You anticipate becoming anxious or worry that the thought will hang around because it used to do so.
- The quicker you catch OCD, the faster it disappears.
- We noted the importance of filling up the void left by OCD with your goals and activities at the forefront.
- Think of activities which will give you more emotional strength as a person.
- You may decide to begin new activities or make changes to your lifestyle which will allow you to explore more of your potential.

Complete Resolution of OCD

- You give zero credibility to the doubt.
- You have no reactions, emotional or behavioral, to the doubt.
- None of your behavior, thinking or anticipating, is driven by the doubt.
- You now react and use your senses in old OCD situations as you do in any other situation.
- You plan ahead on the basis of the person you know you are which is your authentic self.

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Client Practice Card 12
Knowing and Doing: Moving On and Preventing Relapse

Learning Points

- Becoming non-OCD is a question of continuing to put IBT principles into practice.
- Usually if you succeed in overcoming OCD for 6 months, you will not relapse.
- If you slip up, identify where you slipped up and retrace your steps to the appropriate module of exercises.
- If you have managed to deal with OCD after this 12-week therapy program, you are capable of dealing with it for good.
- The insights stemming from the program should bring you to eventual complete remission.

Practical Card

- Foresee stressors which might affect your emotional state of mind.
- Plan ahead for life events or other stressful situations likely to make you vulnerable to one of your OCD themes.
- Continue applying what you have learned in the therapy exercises.
- Engage in (non-OCD) activities which give you feedback on your real self.
- Think of yourself as in OCD remission and build your life and activities around your real self.

How much of you is non-OCD? _____%

If it is less than 80%, you will benefit from repeating the module exercises to see where in the process you are still caught up in OCD.

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