

# Worksheet 1

## Normal Doubt and Obsessional Doubt

Hoarding disorder always begins with doubt. You doubt when you are not sure of something or feel like “things aren’t right.” Without the presence of an initial doubt, you would not feel the need to do compulsions (decide to keep, buy a duplicate...). For example, the person who decides to keep an old magazine does so because she doubts that it is the right decision to dispose of it. She brings up the idea that maybe one day, she will need the information contained in the issue. The person who buys two identical coffee makers does so because he doubts that one will be enough. He fears having to do without if the first ever breaks. Without doubt, there is no compulsion. Moreover, if you don't doubt, you won't worry about the possible consequences like having to have your coffee maker repaired at an exorbitant price if it breaks or having to buy a less attractive and more expensive one. In other words, not only is doubt the cause of the compulsion, but it is also responsible for the discomfort and anxiety you feel that would not exist without the doubt.

In everyday life, you sometimes have doubts that don't turn into obsessions. Why? What is the difference between obsessional doubt and normal doubt? Here are a few things that set them apart:

- **Normal doubt** is triggered by direct evidence or information that comes from your senses.
- **Normal doubt** disappears quickly after obtaining information or the answer.
  
- **Obsessional doubt** occurs even when your common sense tells you that everything is okay.
- **Obsessional doubt** ignores evidence as it attempts to go beyond the senses.
- **Obsessional doubt** increases the more you think about it.

Doubts usually take the form of a maybe. Here are some examples: "Maybe I would like to remember this," "maybe I would like to reuse this," "maybe this garment will become fashionable again," "maybe someone will need this computer part," etc.

### **Examples of normal doubt:**

1. Maybe it will rain this afternoon?  
You may have planned to have a picnic and clouds are obscuring the sky, which is what triggers your doubt about the weather.
2. Maybe I should keep my tax return?  
Knowing the obligation to keep your tax return for a certain number of years can trigger the normal doubt when faced with the idea of shredding your tax documents dating back 5 years.

These normal doubts are triggered by information that comes from your senses, evidence, or common sense, and are therefore appropriate in the context in which they arise. These doubts can be quickly dispelled (by checking the weather forecast or by checking the number of years provided by the tax law) and your common sense assures you that everything has been done to answer your doubts satisfactorily.

### **Examples of obsessional doubt:**

1. Maybe it will rain? (When the sky is blue and completely clear)
2. Maybe I will have problems with tax officers? (By shredding your 20-year-old tax reports)

These doubts, if they are obsessional, are not triggered by specific information. An obsessional doubt leads you to hesitate to discard an item despite the absence of direct information that justifies keeping it. Moreover, even if your common sense tells you that you can dispose of it without any fear, your need to keep it is always present. Eventually, the more you think about it, the more you doubt.

## Exercise Sheet 1

# Normal Doubt and Obsessional Doubt

The purpose of this exercise is to help you better distinguish obsessional doubt from normal doubt. Remember, these doubts are expressed by "maybe."

Try to identify situations where you have obsessional doubts and write them down in the spaces below.

Obsessional doubts

1. **Maybe** \_\_\_\_\_
2. **Maybe** \_\_\_\_\_
3. **Maybe** \_\_\_\_\_
4. **Maybe** \_\_\_\_\_

Remember that the above doubts are causing your hoarding symptoms. Try to imagine what would happen if you didn't have these doubts. How many hoarding symptoms would you have in the absence of these doubts?

Now write down examples of normal doubts that come up in your everyday life that do not lead to compulsions.

Normal doubts

1. **Maybe** \_\_\_\_\_
2. **Maybe** \_\_\_\_\_
3. **Maybe** \_\_\_\_\_
4. **Maybe** \_\_\_\_\_

Using what you learned in Worksheet 1, ask yourself the following questions for each of the doubts you identified:

- Is there information from my senses or direct evidence that justifies my doubt?
- Would the doubt disappear with information?
- Is the doubt based on common sense?
- Does the doubt go beyond the senses?
- Does the doubt increase when you think about it?

This exercise should help you differentiate between obsessional doubt and normal doubt and consolidate what you have learned.

## Worksheet 2

# The Logic of Hoarding

The purpose of last week's exercise was to help you differentiate between normal and obsessional doubts. Now you should be able to identify the initial doubt behind your worries and actions. At this point in the therapy, it is normal that the simple act of differentiating between the two types of doubts does not make your obsessional doubts less credible in your eyes. Today we are going to examine the reasons why you place some importance on your obsessional doubts. In other words, we will examine the reasoning behind the doubt that gives it credibility.

Obsessional doubts are statements about imagined situations that “could happen.” So, they seem likely to you. These doubts do not appear by magic. Even if your doubts sometimes seem unreasonable to you, they are based on conclusions that you draw from a certain reasoning. The hoarding doubt is therefore not just a simple intrusive thought. This is good news, because if obsessional doubts appeared out of nowhere, nothing could be done. So, let's examine where your doubts come from. The following categories will help you identify the reasoning behind your doubts:

1. Common sense
2. Authority
3. Hearsay
4. Previous experience
5. Logical deduction

Let's take an example to illustrate how a person can come to doubt the desirability of throwing away piles of old newspapers. What type of reasoning could justify such a doubt?

1. Reading is good for the intellect and the memory. (Common sense)
2. Great intellectuals keep old documents and refer to them from time to time. (Authority)
3. I heard a story where someone found their biological parents by chance from reading an old newspaper article. (Hearsay)
4. I once regretted throwing away an old magazine because it contained a recipe that I never found again. (Previous experience)
5. Newspaper topics are like fads, they come and go; someday, it will be relevant to re-read some of the articles. (Logical deduction)

As you can see, the elements that are part of the reasoning above seem to make sense. At first glance, your doubt seems to be reasonable since it is based on reasoning. Your doubts therefore seem credible to you because they are based on elements (past experiences, authority, etc.), which serve us all in our reasoning processes. However, there are certain peculiarities in the reasoning process that lead to obsessional doubt. We will come back to this in future modules. For now, try to see your doubts as statements about what "could happen" and that are supported by some reasoning.

## Exercise Sheet 2

### The Logic of Hoarding

In summary, an obsessional doubt is a statement that you consider to be a valid possibility and is supported by a particular reasoning process. It is possible that over time you have learned to act automatically and that you have forgotten the reasoning that accompanied the doubt at the start. From now on, it is important to become aware of how you justify your doubts.

Using your responses from Exercise Sheet 1, choose the obsessional doubt(s) that concern you and enter them in the spaces below:

1. ....
2. ....

Now, using the five categories listed above, try to determine what justifies your doubt. There could be multiple arguments for a single category and no arguments for one or more of these categories.

#### A) Common sense

1. ....
2. ....

#### B) Authority

1. ....
2. ....

#### C) Hearsay

1. ....
2. ....

#### D) Previous experience

1. ....
2. ....

#### E) Logical deduction

1. ....
2. ....

Now you should begin to understand why your obsessional doubts can seem so real to you and are sometimes so hard to dismiss.

## Worksheet 3

# Hoarding Doubts are 100% Imaginary

In the previous module, you learned that your obsessional doubts come from reasoning based on information that can be true in certain contexts and seems logical. Despite this, we can say that your obsessional doubts are still wrong. Why? Because it is not the content of the information that is wrong but rather the context in which you use this information that makes your doubts irrelevant. This is the main difference between a normal doubt and an obsessional doubt.

Imagine the doubts that follow: "Ultimately, maybe I could still wear this item of clothing," or "maybe I'd better buy several sets of cutlery," or even "maybe I should keep all my books because a book is like a friend to me." Is there direct information, in the here and now, taking into account your current situation or your real needs that can support your doubt? Do you foresee a clearly foreseeable use for the object in question? Can you answer the questions: when, where, how and why you will use this object? Does the use you imagine for the object correspond to its real usefulness? In the case of an obsessional doubt, the answer is always no.

Obsessional doubt always comes from vague suppositions or predictions or from erroneous attributions (attribution of unusual virtues to objects). To determine whether your doubts are normal or obsessional, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Is my decision based on a foreseeable and specific use of the object?
2. Is my decision based on the appropriate use of the object? (For example, a book is a book, not a friend)

You may agree that your doubt is not based on the reality around you at the present moment and yet you wonder why this is so important. Without direct information and taking into account your context, your obsessional doubts are as irrelevant as wondering if the ceiling is likely to fall on your head at this very moment.

Further, as you do for your obsessional doubts, it would be easy to use all sorts of arguments to justify the possibility of the ceiling collapsing. So why don't you worry about it? You might answer that it is unlikely. It is the same for your obsessional doubts and yet you take them seriously. The reason you don't worry about the ceiling collapsing on you is that you don't have any information here and now that leads you to think that. It would be different if you suddenly heard a huge noise coming from the ceiling, accompanied by major cracks. In this context, your doubt would be relevant.

However, when you are in your hoarding bubble, you doubt in the absence of direct information. Reasoning that is not based on reality and that does not take into account the appropriate context is 100% imaginary and therefore improbable.

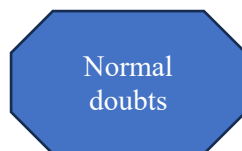


Figure 1: World of reality

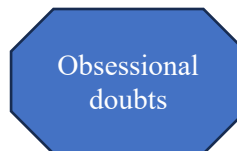


Figure 2: World of imagination

The difference between obsessional doubt and normal doubt is that normal doubt always relies on something in reality, whereas obsessional doubt seems to come from nowhere. In other words, the obsessional doubt always comes from yourself and never from outside.

## **Exercise Sheet 3**

### **Hoarding Doubts are 100% Imaginary**

As a result of this information, it is possible that you are able to accept, from an intellectual point of view at least, that your obsessional doubts come 100% from you. However, understanding something is not enough when you want to change things. You must therefore apply your new knowledge to your obsessional doubts. How? Asking yourself if the elements of your reasoning that make your doubt seem real apply in the here and now.

Here are some examples of thoughts that are part of the hoarding disorder's reasoning process that can convince you that your doubt is justified: "I keep all the crafts that my children have made since they bear witness to past moments that we cherish," "Since you never know what you might find at a garage sale, I make sure to visit all of them in my area. Who knows, maybe I'll find a little treasure?" "You get rid of something just to need it the next day!" "Throwing things away is wasteful; rather than throwing things away, I keep everything and I will use these objects one day if I need them." "Everything can be reused in some way; in my grandmother's time she would collect everything and use it." At first glance, it may not be obvious that these notions have nothing to do with reality, since they are about real things. However, if this information does not relate to the here and now, it is not at all relevant to your situation.

As you go through the exercises formulated to help you deal with your hoarding disorder, you will realize that hoarding is a very creative disorder that easily finds a significant amount of information to fuel your doubts. The good news is that the hoarding is always wrong! None of the doubts of the many hoarding disorder sufferers we have known have ever been proven correct. However, the hoarding announces, "But maybe this time it could happen." But since obsessional doubt does not arise from reality, it is always false.

To realize the inconsistency of hoarding disorder, let's apply your hoarding reasoning to situations without hoarding concerns. Suppose you want to cross the street. You look left then right and if you don't see a car then you cross. If you applied hoarding logic, you would distrust your senses, telling yourself things like "If the car I see in the distance is approaching faster than it looks, I might get hit," and you would never cross!

In order to put this notion into practice, choose one of your doubts and try to remember the last time when it really worried you. Ask yourself if, in this situation, the doubt was based on something real. Do not try to convince yourself of anything since that is not the purpose of the exercise. When you wonder about a doubt, write down all the thoughts that come to mind. Then, examine each thought separately and ask yourself if it is based on elements related to the here and now. Reject, as you go along, each of the previously identified thoughts that do not rely on the here and now. Write down any thoughts you are unable to reject and discuss them with your therapist.

## Worksheet 4

# How Hoarding Becomes a Lived Experience

Why do obsessional doubts feel so real? In order to answer this question, we must understand the reason why some things seem real to us.

Take, for example, the activity you are involved in now: reading this page. Why does this activity seem real to you? It is thanks to the information coming from your senses (you see the words on this page) but especially because a story which is based on the past, the present, and the future is attached to it. Ask yourself the question: Why did you decide to read this page? Almost immediately a whole story unfolds, a story that can be read like a novel. Indeed, you see yourself in the past struggling with hoarding disorder, looking for resources to find help, meeting with your therapist, talking and asking questions; you see yourself again looking at your piles of objects at home with the hope of overcoming the hoarding disorder one day. Imagine for a moment that you are reading this page but have never been involved in the experiences described above, that they never happened. How real would the content of this page seem to you?

In a way, listening to your own thoughts is like reading a novel. This is not just a coincidence, rather it is part of how we organize opinions and feelings about ourselves and the perception of the world around us. So, a story unfolds and we add elements to it that make the world around us more real and compelling. So here we are on the way to the grocery store or to work, chatting with friends or family, or even having obsessional doubts. So, in a way, we spend our lives telling stories. These influence our experiences, our beliefs, and also how real these beliefs seem to us. Likewise, obsessional notions and their credibility rely on the stories we tell ourselves. This gives them a certain realism. One of the problems with hoarding disorder is that you may be aware that the doubt is ridiculous and unbelievable, but when you're in a hoarding situation, you feel compelled to act on the doubt. As already argued, this stems from the fact that the hoarding story gives the doubt a certain reality, whether or not you believe it when you find yourself out of the hoarding situation.

Of course, you are already aware of the story behind your accumulated items. After all, during previous sessions you have already identified many thoughts that seem to justify the obsessional doubts attached to them. However, all those tidbits of information that you identified before must now be added together to form a story. It is this story that makes the real doubt appear. The hoarding story can include all kinds of elements, such as facts or inferences that seem to refer to reality, but which are never based on direct information from the reality around you.

At this point in therapy, you may agree that obsessional doubts about your belongings play a major role in your hoarding problem, but you may be wondering how you are going to go about changing these doubts. As previously argued, obsessional doubt seems real since it is backed by a compelling story. It is therefore obvious that we must change the story. In order to get there, over the next few weeks you will be looking at the hoarding story and the elements that make the doubt seem real. You will also need to craft another story. By formulating an alternate story, you will automatically diminish the effect of the hoarding story. It won't happen overnight and it takes a lot of practice. However, if you persevere and if you have the proper techniques, you can get out of the hoarding disorder bubble and you will end up living a different story.

Here is an example of a hoarding story:

“I'd better keep all the local newspapers so that I don't lose useful information. These newspapers contain a lot of information and it is impossible for me to read them all and especially to remember everything. By keeping them, I will be sure to be able to find all the information. On the other hand, if I send them away for recycling, I will no longer have the opportunity to consult them and I could lose the information I need. Basically, everything that leaves the house is a loss for me.”

## Exercise Sheet 4

### How Hoarding Becomes a Lived Experience

With your therapist, choose an obsessional doubt, the one that bothers you the most or the one that you have lingered on the most during previous encounters. Then, write down all the justifications that you have gradually identified behind this doubt. Organize and complete this information so that it looks like a story with a plot, like a novel. You then have your hoarding story explaining why this doubt seems real. This story can be completed over multiple days with other elements.

This next step is essential since it will allow you to put the hoarding story into perspective. For this, you will begin to craft an alternate story. This must relate to the hoarding situation in which the chosen doubt manifests itself. It must be very descriptive, thus containing the maximum amount of sensory and direct information usually found in the hoarding situation. Like some novels, you will focus on describing a scene with you as the main character. Colors, smells, noises, anything you might perceive in this hoarding situation should be used. Your work in creating the alternate story is a creative process. Imagine that your mind is a canvas on which you paint several versions of reality. The painter does not question himself constantly and at each stage of the process to know if the picture he is painting is better than the previous one. So, you don't have to wonder if the hoarding story is better than the alternate story. The painter would like this painting to be quite simply as "real" and as "alive" as possible.

Also, it is a mistake to view the development of the alternate story as merely an intellectual exercise to help you "solve" your hoarding problem. It is not a question of finding arguments contradicting the justifications of the hoarding. Such an attitude will help the hoarding disorder get rid of anything you bring as an alternative. The act of exploring alternate stories only represents the will to imagine and engage in a different story where the description of the reality of the moment predominates.

Both stories are subject to change over time as they represent works in development. The alternate story will change as the therapy progresses, since as often as possible you will try to add new elements so that it becomes more real to you. These elements can relate to all kinds of information. However, unlike the hoarding story, you will add elements that rely on reality or your senses since this kind of information is never part of the hoarding story.

Don't be discouraged if, at first, the hoarding story and its elements seem more convincing to you than the alternate story. This is completely normal. The belief level in the alternate story may be very low at first since, indeed, that is why you are suffering from hoarding disorder. Completing the alternate story and reading or thinking about it often is intended to make the story and its elements more real to you. Thus, little by little, the hoarding story will give way to this alternative story based solely on reality.

Remember that your therapist will not try to convince you by bringing up new elements to make you "see the light." He can help you find new material if you're having trouble and help you fix the alternative story so it makes more sense to you, but he can't do the work for you. The only "magical" solution to overcoming hoarding disorder is the magic we perform every day through the stories we tell ourselves and how those stories turn into lived experience. So, unless you want someone else to live in your place, it's up to you to make the alternate story real and relevant.

Now, consider an example of an alternate story:

"I see stacks of newspapers that are yellowed and dusty. They pile up in the corner of the living room without my consulting them. They remain there, without any real use. They are there, just in case... But the opportunities to consult them do not arrive. I have no idea what they contain, and I have no desire to search for information in these papers. I know that the best ways to obtain accessible and "up to date" information are by using the internet or by calling the right place. When I think of the times when I needed information in the past, I always had the reflex to go to my office to do research on the internet and I always got the information I was looking for. I know myself and I know that I don't like to search for a long time for information. Considering these facts, I know I had better get rid of newspapers as I receive new releases. The information contained in these newspapers is constantly being renewed and I wish to have in my possession only the most current information. Basically, the old newspapers that I take out of the house represent gains for me; I gain space for relevant information."



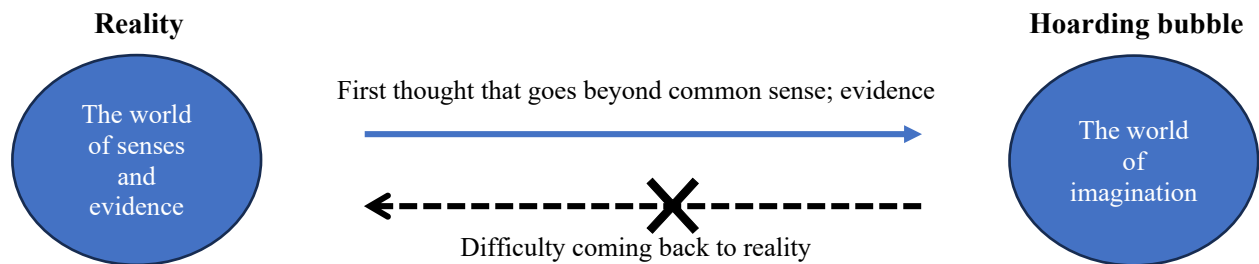
## Worksheet 5

### Crossing the Border of Reality

The goal of hoarding disorder is to make you doubt as much as possible. This is no small feat since nothing in the reality around you supports its doubt. The hoarding disorder can be convincing only if it appeals to assumptions as well as obsessional links that you have created. It tries to make you believe that whatever comes from your senses and your common sense is of little importance. Quickly, these elements fit into the hoarding story and make your doubt seem more real.

For example, let's say you keep clothes that you no longer wear. There is no evidence that you will ever wear them. They don't fit you anymore; they're old-fashioned and worn out. You haven't worn them in over five years. The only way to give make the doubt "maybe I will need it one day" seem real is to appeal to information that does not take into account direct evidence: "I like these clothes because they remind me beautiful memories; I found them beautiful and comfortable; It's hard to find clothes of this quality these days; Maybe I could take a sewing class to learn how to make alterations? Or create other clothes from these...? You know in life, you get rid of something and then realize that you can't find anything like it again." All of these arguments may not necessarily be wrong, yet if they do not originate in the immediate reality, in the evidence before you, the hoarding doubt is 100% imaginary and irrelevant.

When you are in the hoarding bubble, you are no longer in reality. There is a precise moment when you fall into the imaginary "world" of the hoarding disorder. This moment can be identified. It happens from the first thought that takes you beyond the direct evidence. This can be represented by the following figure:



When you enter the world of hoarding, whatever you perceive in the reality around you no longer seems to matter. You are caught up in a spiral of imagined and dramatic consequences that make you very anxious. You have severed all connection with the reassuring perception of reality.

Moreover, once the border that separates the real from the imaginary is crossed, it is very difficult to retrace your steps. This is explained by the fact that you have abandoned all the criteria based on reality, the only things able to resolve the doubt in a permanent way. Of course, in the world of hoarding you can always decide to keep an object or to acquire a new object "just in case" but how can you really know if it is really relevant to keep or obtain this object? Hoarding rituals are only a temporary solution to the problem since knowing when to stop the compulsions depends solely on the whims of your hoarding disorder.

## Exercise Sheet 5

### Crossing the Border of Reality

This exercise is a detailed description of the exercise that you will find on the weekly training card. Use this sheet to become familiar with the exercise, and so that you don't need to use it again except as a reminder. Rest assured, the goal of this exercise is not to stop you from doing anything! Thus, this exercise does not represent a frightening experience. It is rather aimed at the acquisition of a new awareness.

#### **Step 1**

When an obsessional doubt arises in your mind, stop and do nothing more! Imagine yourself in front of a bridge separating reality, the world in which you still find yourself, from the imaginary world of the hoarding disorder. Something seems to be pushing you forward and pulling you across the bridge. This is the first thought beyond sensory information. Ask yourself the following questions:

What's the first thought that comes to mind that pushes me beyond sensory information?

How does this thought make me regard the senses as having very little relevance?

#### **Step 2**

When you have identified the exact thought that pushes you to cross the border separating the real world from the imaginary world, do not react immediately by performing compulsions or avoiding. Do nothing for at least a minute and think.

Standing in front of this bridge, you feel the need to react to the doubt. It seems to you that the doubt will be resolved only if you cross the bridge and enter the world of the hoarding bubble. However, turn around and look at the world of senses and direct information from where you came. There the doubt had little relevance because there was nothing to back it up.

#### **Step 3**

Now choose what you are going to do. You can move forward in the world of hoarding, worry more about the doubt, try to resolve it in some way, and in all likelihood, worry more. Or you can return to the world of the senses and direct information where doubt was 100% arbitrary and had little relevance.

If you move forward in the hoarding bubble, ask yourself the following questions: "Have I managed to resolve the doubt permanently?" "Will the doubt return in similar situations?"

If you have decided to return to the world of the senses and direct information, ask yourself questions about why you were convinced that the doubt was imaginary and not something in need of your attention. Did you use your senses and direct information? How permanent was the resolution of the doubt?

#### **Step 4**

Write down the most important thoughts that have taken you beyond the senses. Discuss this with your therapist at the next session and add this information to your hoarding story.

Remember to keep rewriting and crafting your alternate story when you're not in a hoarding situation. This is an exercise you should continue throughout therapy.

## Worksheet 6

# Hoarding Reasoning Strategies: Part 1

As demonstrated above, in order to make obsessional doubt seem real, the most important trick of hoarding disorder is to appeal to information that goes beyond the senses and direct information. However, like any seller of useless goods, the hoarding has a lot of tricks up its sleeve. In one way or another, these ploys all relate to appealing to information that lies beyond the senses and direct information.

Gaining a detailed understanding of each of these strategies and knowing what's going on can help move you away from doubt by making it seem less real. These strategies are part of the hoarding story and this week's exercises will focus on learning how to identify them.

Below are six strategies used by hoarding disorder:

### 1. Wrong categories

Confusing two categories of information or two categories of objects in such a way that one seems to be related to the other, but in fact, it is not. If A is true, then B is also true.

Example: "If I keep photos of my children, then I must keep their schoolwork, crafts, etc."

### 2. Apparently comparable events

Confusing two different events that are separate in time or place.

Example: "I have already given away an item of clothing that I no longer wear, and I regretted it."

### 3. Selective use of out of context facts

Abstract and general facts are applied to your personal situation.

Example: "Our modern society produces more and more waste, but not me. I protect the environment; I don't throw anything away."

### 4. Completely imagined scenarios

Crafting compelling stories "from scratch" and beginning to live them.

Example: "I imagine my children's old toys ending up in the hands of jaded children who break them or leave them in a corner of the closet, and I feel sad and depressed to see them so neglected."

### 5. Reverse reasoning

The conclusions come before consulting the evidence in the here and now, rather than after observing reality.

Example: "Perhaps at some point someone will ask me for these magazines. So, I'd better keep them."

### 6. Distrust of the senses

Ignoring the senses, even rejecting sensory information.

Example: "You have to go beyond what you can see; you have to see the unsuspected potential in an object."

## **Exercise Sheet 6**

### **Hoarding Reasoning Strategies: Part 1**

The purpose of this exercise is to learn to identify the tricks of the hoarding disorder that try to convince you that your obsessional doubt is real.

Identifying hoarding reasoning strategies is not easy. When you're in the middle of an emotional whirlwind, these can feel very real to you. For example, you examine your old school notebooks and you feel immersed in beautiful memories during this period of your life. You may then begin to doubt that it is better to get rid of them and then you begin to think that you must keep them all or all these memories could be erased one day. These thoughts can cause strong emotions of anxiety, anguish, sadness, or depression. In this emotional rush, you may be unable to stop to examine the situation and identify the reasoning that led you to doubt your decluttering.

Don't worry if you are not always able to precisely identify the strategy used by the hoarding disorder since sometimes one strategy can overlap with others. The simple fact of making the effort to ask questions about the hoarding is already a step in the right direction.

Use your hoarding story to identify faulty reasonings or draw on other examples from hoarding situations you may have encountered today. Then, enter them below in the category you think is appropriate.

Wrong categories: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Apparently comparable events: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Selective use of out of context facts: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Completely imagined scenarios: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Reverse reasoning: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Distrust of the senses: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

This week's training card contains exercises that will help you identify these strategies in as many hoarding situations as possible. Use the training card each day to identify the errors in reasoning underlying your obsessional doubts. Good luck!

## Worksheet 7

### Hoarding Reasoning Strategies: Part 2

Being aware of hoarding reasoning strategies teaches us something very important. Indeed, do you realize that the hoarding reasoning strategies make your obsessional doubt totally false?

All of these reasoning tricks cause you to distrust the reality around you when in fact the mere presence of these strategies indicates that there is a flaw in the original hoarding disorder argument. In other words, the hoarding story and all these errors of reasoning always take you away from reality and go against your senses and direct information. That's why when the hoarding doubt arises, it is always wrong. Your senses and direct information tell you "certain" information and only then does the hoarding doubt make you less certain.

Here is what to remember about the strategies employed by the hoarding disorder:

1. Living a doubt as if it were real does not make it real. (Purely imaginary sequence)
2. The fact that you regretted giving your dress to a friend has nothing to do with the broken mixer cluttering your closet. (Apparently comparable events)
3. Although it is true that reading increases general knowledge, if you never consult your encyclopedias, they are not really learning tools. (Selective use of facts out of context)
4. Starting with obsessive doubt and trying to find evidence to support it is possible, but it will take you away from reality since doubt goes beyond the senses from the start. It has nothing to do with what's around you and you might as well be worried about meteors falling on your head. (Reverse reasoning)
5. Going beyond the obvious will bring you very quickly into the world of the hoarding bubble and whatever you may feel in this NO SENSE world will be determined simply by your imagination. (Distrust of the senses)
6. Just because two categories of information look alike doesn't mean they're the same. Regarding obsessional doubt, it must be remembered that it is not based on reality. For example, "If I keep this 'Mother's Day' card my child made, I might as well keep the model he made in science class." (Category error)

At this stage, at least from an intellectual point of view, you should be able to recognize that the hoarding story is wrong. However, if you still have objections to the theoretical notions discussed, which is quite possible, you should discuss your thoughts with your therapist.

Moreover, despite a good theoretical understanding of how hoarding disorder works, it happens that people who follow this therapy are reluctant to take the first concrete steps to get out of the hoarding bubble. They may say to themselves:

"If the obsessional doubt is wrong, then what am I going to rely on? If I can't trust the hoarding story, then how can I decide if something is right or wrong?"

The non-hoarding (alternative) story you've been developing over the past few weeks is the answer. In the non-hoarding story, you use totally different reasoning than you do in the hoarding story. Indeed, the non-hoarding story conforms to the senses and the reality of the here and now while the hoarding story does not. So, in conclusion, the non-hoarding story contains no errors of reasoning and you can trust it!

## Exercise Sheet 7

### Hoarding Reasoning Strategies: Part 2

Identifying errors in the reasoning of the hoarding stories of other people can help you because you are able to distance yourself and acquire a more objective perspective, which will be useful to you in the examination of your own doubts.

Read the following two obsessive stories and identify the hoarding disorders strategies. Write them between the parentheses. Each time you have successfully identified an error in reasoning, try to realize why it makes the doubt false.

In the following example, a person with hoarding disorder tells a story that convinces her that she could lose a unique opportunity if she did not go to her church bazaar every week:

So, I say to myself: "There are so many people who get rid of their objects without really knowing their true value, you know like for example, objects that they would have inherited, and I think that I could therefore find something of great value for a few dollars in a bazaar (\_\_\_\_\_). I also tell myself that at the bazaar I could find almost new objects that I could give as gifts to my children and grandchildren (\_\_\_\_\_). Since I don't have a lot of money, I can't afford to buy a lot of things except when I can find them cheap. In the bazaars, I can save since I buy cheap (\_\_\_\_\_). I tell myself that it is better to buy while I have the opportunity than to wait until I need it and have to pay a more expensive price (\_\_\_\_\_). It reassures me to buy my presents in advance since I can't imagine how I would feel if I happened to not be able to give a present to one of my grandchildren. I feel completely torn when I think this could happen (\_\_\_\_\_). After shopping, I come home, put my bags on a pile of other similar bags and think to myself that I got a good deal because one day, I will surely use it (\_\_\_\_\_)."

The following example is about someone having trouble decluttering a room in their house that contains large piles of newspapers:

"When I look at this room, I tell myself that it makes no sense to pile up so many old newspapers. Then, after a few minutes, when I examine one of them, I realize that there is a lot of information in these issues that I could not read if I got rid of them (\_\_\_\_\_). There could be information in the obituaries, for example, that would inform me that a person I knew has died (\_\_\_\_\_). If I don't see it in the newspaper, I might never know (\_\_\_\_\_). I have always had a weakness for newspapers because they are sort of witnesses to the events that took place during my existence (\_\_\_\_\_). When I am old, I will have forgotten many things and I will need them to remind me of important events (\_\_\_\_\_). It is well known that the elderly need everything to be written down, otherwise they forget. When I pick up a newspaper, say, from 1975, I will say to myself: 'I lived during that year!' (\_\_\_\_\_). These journals make me feel like I exist (\_\_\_\_\_)."

How quickly were you able to dismiss the hoarding stories above? If these stories significantly differ from yours, then you should be able to rule them out fairly quickly. If not, they will require a little more thought.

The exercises described in the training card for this week are intended to resolve some of your doubts in situations where you believe you can resolve your doubts. These exercises will require you to:

- 1) Identify the errors in reasoning behind the doubt,
- 2) Realize why the errors in reasoning are the basis of your doubt and therefore make it unjustified,
- 3) Recall your alternative story to replace the obsessive story, and
- 4) Dispel the doubt.

Each time, the exercise should not last more than one or two minutes. If you are not able to discard the hoarding story, don't worry too much, but try again later in an easier situation.

Remember to continue practicing and building your non-hoarding story outside of hoarding situations.

## Worksheet 8

# The Selective Nature of Obsessional Doubt

Why do you have doubts about your possessions but not about other people's belongings? You may have noticed that you are adept at convincing other hoarders to discard certain items but surprisingly feel unable to apply these same guidelines to yourself. You shouldn't be surprised. Your obsessional doubts apply only to your belongings, not to other people's possessions. It means that you perceive the belongings of others in a real way, but you perceive your possessions from an obsessional point of view. That said, know that since you can see other's belongings from the point of view of evidence, it means that you already have all the capacities necessary to make good decisions.

To convince yourself of this, mentally note all the items, data, or opportunities that come your way that you do not accumulate. Think of a typical day. You see and hear a wealth of information throughout your day. Do you take note of it all? What type of information do you decide not to retain? Consider the advertisements you receive by mail (credit cards, carpet cleaning, cell phones, lawn maintenance, etc.). Do you answer each of them? You may pass by a multitude of stores during your day without stopping at each one. How many do you pass without interest? You may also be offered boxing, dancing, or vegetarian cooking classes. Do you attend them all? How do you manage not to accumulate all these opportunities? You may have approached one of these example situations in a hoarding disorder fashion. However, the majority of these situations did not cause you any problems.

This demonstrates something very important:

**IN MOST AREAS IN YOUR LIFE, YOU HAVE NO PROBLEMS WITH ACCUMULATION.**

Since you have no problems in a variety of situations, that means your reasoning is correct most of the time. The majority of the time, you do not confuse the imaginary with the real.

So why should situations where you experience hoarding obsessions be any different? The fact that you don't realize that your reasoning in hoarding situations differs from non-hoarding situations is one reason. It is therefore important to become aware of how you reason in hoarding situations and how far this deviates from your usual reasoning.

To do this, let's first examine a commonplace situation that does not cause obsessional doubt in most individuals suffering from hoarding disorder: you intend to cross a street. If this situation elicits obsessional doubts, you and your therapist must think of another situation. How do you decide that it is not dangerous to cross? What information do you use to determine if it is safe? You look left and right to make sure there is no car in sight. You then decide if it is safe to cross. In other words, you do not feel the need to go beyond direct information. In this situation, you won't make up a story to convince yourself that despite having already looked, a car might be about to arrive. Indeed, your senses prevail over your reasoning, and you will have no doubt in this situation since, after all, the idea that it may be dangerous to cross is totally fictitious.

Now, let's compare the situation above to a situation in which obsessional doubt is quite common. You are about to throw away an old phone book since you received a new one. Although there is no direct information to tell you that you still need it, you doubt it and feel the need to think about it a little. You imagine a situation where you might need it, for example, "Maybe the new directory might contain errors." This is a fictional situation, but it could happen. You turn back and put it away with the new one, just in case. In this hoarding situation, your reasoning is different: you are in an imaginary world and you do not trust the evidence. Yet, if you used the same reasoning that you use to decide most things in your life, you would behave the same way you did when deciding to cross the street. In other words, you would say, "I have no direct information that the new directory has any errors, it seems to me perfectly correct and moreover, it is up to date." This event is no different from crossing the street.

If you realize that the doubt is not based on direct information, in principle you should be able to confront the hoarding situation with the same confidence as crossing a street. The challenge is realizing that hoarding situations are similar to other situations you encounter in your daily life and therefore there is no reason to act differently in hoarding situations.

Keep in mind that the mistake of hoarding disorder is to consider a possibility as fact rather than speculation. To react as the hoarding would like would be equivalent to saying, “I am not leaving the sidewalk (preventive measure) since it would be possible for a car to turn the corner without my noticing it (possibility).”



## **Exercise Sheet 8**

### **The Selective Nature of Obsessional Doubt**

As we mentioned before, when several hoarding sufferers meet, they look at each other with a certain degree of reciprocity by taking notice of their respective obsessions. However, they remain somewhat skeptical about the “usefulness” of an object kept by another person with hoarding disorder or even about the reasons invoked to justify the attachment to this object. Yet fundamentally, one person's obsession is no different from another's. They are based on the same processes. It would also be useful for you to see that all the obsessions are alike so that you can distance yourself from your hoarding story. Indeed, why give credit to your hoarding story and not those of others?

To understand how any scenario can turn into an obsessive situation, let's take the situation where you have to cross a street but add the following story to it:

“It is dangerous to cross the street. I heard of an accident that happened to someone who was always very careful. Thus, accidents can happen unexpectedly even if you pay attention to cars. When I cross a street, I don't just look two or three times left or right. I would rather stay there, waiting for a few minutes to see if there are any cars coming. Even if I don't see any cars, there may be one suddenly turning the corner. Or it could be a silent car that I can't hear since now there are electric cars. In the end, I often decide not to cross the street. Quite simply, I don't feel safe even though there is no traffic.”

As you can see, we invented a story to make a banal situation problematic. How is it possible to make a situation so obsessive that it was conceivable to consider never crossing the street again? The answer is, of course, the one you've heard about many times before... going beyond direct information. Revisit this story and identify the elements that go beyond direct information and thus bring doubt into a situation that by all accounts is not dangerous if you use direct information.

With your therapist, now choose an object that you don't want to keep and, as in the previous example, we want you to make this object obsessive. In other words, think of all the reasons why you should keep this object. Also consider any problems that might arise if you discard this item. Write it all down, developing a story of about 5-10 sentences. When you have written this obsessional story, put it side by side with your hoarding story. Examine the similarities between the two.

You should be able to see that your hoarding story is not at all different from the one you fabricated “from scratch” in the exercise above. Now ask yourself the following question: Why am I going to use a story that goes beyond the evidence and objective criteria in the case of my “hoarding” objects but not in others? After all, the story you just wrote is no different from your hoarding story. If you are able to realize that the “neutral” object you obsessed over does not differ from the objects in your hoarding story, then perhaps you can behave in hoarding situations the same way you do in non-hoarding situations.

The training card for this week contains a similar exercise. It will ask you to take note daily of all the situations around you in which you trust direct information. Later, you will need to compare these to situations where you use hoarding reasoning. We want you to realize that your reasoning is normal in many situations and to encourage you to trust direct information and evidence in hoarding situations, as you already do in most situations in your daily life.

## Worksheet 9

# Vulnerable Self Themes in Hoarding Disorder

Since we are nearing the end of the modules, we want to explain the selective nature of the hoarding doubt. In other words, why do you have obsessional doubts in some areas of your life and not in others?

One way to explain this is to realize that, for some reason, you are more vulnerable to themes that affect you on an identity level. These can differ from one person to another because they relate to a theme that is personal to you. Often this theme runs through your hoarding story. For example, if in general you are afraid of lacking something at home, this theme of vulnerability makes you apt to develop obsessions in this sphere of your life. You may then develop obsessions and doubts about being an irresponsible or negligent person even though the evidence tells you otherwise. We are all vulnerable to something, but from person to person it is expressed in different ways. Also, not all people develop compulsive hoarding problems. It is only when these vulnerabilities become part of the process of confusing reality and imagination that you are well on your way to developing hoarding disorder.

Your hoarding vulnerable self-theme has a story in which you take the lead and become the person you think you are (your identity), fear you are, or don't want to be. For example, if you frequently obsess over “mistaking important information,” then you may see yourself as the “type” of person who is likely to make careless mistakes. Consider a story like this:

"I'm the type of person who might not pay enough attention"

"Because I am a dreamer, I often don't pay enough attention to what I'm doing. Because of this, I risk making mistakes (for example, misreading numbers on my invoices). Also, I might not notice important information on documents. If I keep everything, I can trace my mistakes."

“When I was young, I was not an attentive child. If I had been more attentive and present at school, I would have become a doctor like my cousin. My friend is a person who lives in the present moment; she is attentive and rigorous. I am less efficient and less organized even if I give the appearance of being put together.”

Here is another example that illustrates the theme of a person who fears losing memories and forgetting important moments in their life:

“I am the type of person who could forget his memories”

“I'm a person who doesn't have a very good memory. Sometimes I try to think of a name that I can't remember. I also sometimes go to a room in my house to look for something and find that I have forgotten what I came to look for. For this reason, when I go to an event or do an activity outside the home, I take hundreds of photos. I want to collect as many memories as possible. That way, I can look at my photos and remember all the beautiful moments I've had.”

You may identify with these stories. However, it is obvious that these people see themselves as different from other people. According to them, their difference is likely to cause them negative consequences. Since they see themselves this way, it is relatively easy to imagine that they will be vulnerable to certain types of obsessions and compulsions.

What is your vulnerable self-theme? What are the negative consequences that your feared self could cause you to experience?

After identifying how your obsession or doubt relates to your particular way of seeing yourself, the next step is to identify the story that convinces you to see yourself that way. What are the reasons for your particular way of perceiving yourself?

## Exercise Sheet 9

# Vulnerable Self Themes in Hoarding Disorder

Your vulnerable self-theme leads you to give credibility to your obsessional doubts. In a way, the hoarding disorder is doing its best to undermine your self-confidence in important aspects of your life. We do not argue that this is the cause of the hoarding disorder. The root cause of hoarding remains unknown. But it is certain that this image of yourself as someone who “could be inattentive” or who “could forget” contributes to the maintenance of the problem.

So how are you going to change this self-image of vulnerability? First, be aware of who the hoarding disorder says you are. Start by writing a story describing this person as portrayed by the hoarding disorder. Use your main vulnerable self-theme as described in the worksheet. For example: "I might be the type of person who might be inattentive" or "I'm the type of person who can forget important things." Try to expand on this story as much as possible by writing down all the reasons why you might be this kind of person as dictated by your hoarding disorder.

After writing your vulnerable self-theme story, write an alternate story in which the content supports the opposite. For example, if the first story says, "I'm the type of person who might be inattentive," then the alternate story should support, "I'm the type of person who pays sufficient attention to important things." Similarly, if in the first story you gave reasons why you believe you are “a person at risk of forgetting important things,” in the second story, give reasons justifying the opposite; in other words, why are you "the type of person who remembers the most important things?" Then, compare the two stories. If you examine both stories when you feel calm and serene, ask yourself which of the two really describes you? In all likelihood, the alternate story is much more correct. For your next session, bring these two stories with you to share your insights into your true nature with your therapist.

Another exercise described on your training card is to reconsider your words when talking about yourself. Avoid using automatic phrases, metaphors, or sayings that could reinforce this negative view of yourself. When you are aware that you are talking about yourself in a way that might reinforce your vulnerable self-theme, take a step back by using more appropriate language that will help you see yourself in a non-hoarding way.

For example:

Replace: "I'm a very inattentive person!"

With: “My level of attention varies according to the importance of the situation. I am attentive enough when the situation requires it.”

Replace: "I have no brain, I forget everything!"

With: "It is rare that I forget really important things."

Replace: "I'm lost without my items."

With: "I am a whole person, and my belongings have nothing to do with who I am.”

## Worksheet 10

### Awareness of Reality – Tolerating Emptiness

We have come to the last worksheet of your therapy. The progress you have made depends on several factors and results vary from person to person. Some people will need more work, while others may benefit from short-term therapy. You may still have obsessional doubts that you haven't worked with your therapist and may need to review the worksheets from the beginning. Also, during future sessions and even after therapy has ended, when you practice on your own, it is important to deepen and reinforce what you have learned so far during your treatment. Gradually, you will increase your ability to dispel obsessional doubts in increasingly difficult situations.

However, by now, one thing should be quite obvious: Obsessional doubt is totally different from normal doubt.

You may feel that you agree with everything you learned during therapy. However, you may still often fall prey to strong compulsions. If this is the case, you do not agree with everything covered thus far because if you really agreed with everything, you would have no obsessional doubts or compulsions to acquire or accumulate. If you do not address aspects of therapy that you disagree with, it is quite possible that you will continue to have hoarding disorder, so it is important to identify aspects of therapy that you are still having problems with and discuss them with your therapist.

You may also have already observed a change in your compulsions during therapy. Perhaps your doubts have diminished in intensity and in a completely natural way and without too much effort, at least for certain situations, you have begun to engage in fewer compulsive behaviors. So, now, what should we do to progress? To overcome hoarding disorder, the goal is to be fully aware of the reality of things around you in hoarding situations, and to tolerate the strangeness and discomfort that making new choices may cause in you.

Being aware of reality requires referring to information in the "here and now," that is, specific information within the appropriate context. This means that you have to really perceive what exists around you and be attentive to your belongings as they are instead of indulging in guesswork based on a hoarding story. Indeed, instead of avoiding a situation or adding a doubt to it that stems from your imagination, you must trust reality, which is based on direct information. As you have learned in your therapy thus far, if you rely on direct information, there will be no room for obsessional doubt.

Could it be as easy as trusting the evidence in front of you? Yes and no. It's easy because if you really trust direct information, you won't have obsessive doubt. However, it is not easy because you will feel like you are not doing the right thing when you rely on direct information. You will be faced with an unpleasant feeling of strangeness. This can produce anxiety and discomfort. Yet you are doing the right thing and indeed, trusting direct information is all you need to do to get yourself out of the hoarding disorder.

Rest assured, this feeling of discomfort is only temporary and it eventually disappears!

## **Exercise Sheet 10**

### **Awareness of Reality – Tolerating Emptiness**

The exercise on this page is the culmination of all the exercises you have done so far. This is a strategy for dealing with obsessional doubts. If your hoarding disorder is very strong, you are not expected to always use this strategy, but try to use it when you believe you can step away from the imaginary world and back to the real world where everything is safe. You will gain more and more self-confidence as you continue to practice this exercise. Indeed, you will be more and more able to approach situations that you once found more difficult. If you can do this often, you will find that obsessional doubts do not arise as frequently or as vividly as before. If obsessional doubts do not arise at all, then this implies that you are truly aware of the imaginary nature of doubt.

- 1) When you experience an obsessional doubt, stay calm, do nothing. Imagine that you find yourself between two worlds: in the middle of a bridge connecting reality and imagination.
- 2) Focus on the world of reality. Look at what's there. Look only once to capture the direct information obtained by your senses. Do not use extra effort to do this.
- 3) At this precise moment, try to realize that what you see represents all the information you need. Any effort to obtain more information means that you have switched to the world of imagination.
- 4) Look down from the bridge you are on. The emptiness you observe represents your feeling of not having done enough. It also represents all the anxiety and discomfort you feel when you don't trust direct information but dive into the world of imagination. Stop for a moment to realize that this world is imaginary. The certainty of reality is only found in the world of direct information, and you do not need to cross the bridge.
- 5) Next, act on the direct information you have obtained. Do not engage in compulsive behaviors and dismiss the obsession.

Since your hoarding disorder will urge you to go beyond what is necessary, at first you will have difficulty relying on direct information and perceiving what is really around you. It is therefore necessary to pay attention to several things during this exercise. Truly relying on direct information involves letting your senses tell you, naturally and in exactly the same way as in non-hoarding situations, what is around you.

This excludes:

- 1) Starting to examine an object in detail - if you look at an object for a long time, it means that you are trying too hard to overcome your hoarding disorder. Indeed, from the moment you fix your gaze, you are immersed in the hoarding world.
- 2) Quick glance - when you glance quickly, you create ambiguity, which reinforces your imagination.
- 3) Using your imagination to disentangle ambiguous perceptions - when you cannot perceive something clearly, then be aware that this way of going about it is not the correct way to really look at something.

This exercise, like all the others, should show you that certainty does not come from hard work. Indeed, certainty is there in front of you and has always been there. The thing hoarding takes away from you is the reassuring perception of reality. As you begin to act on direct information, you can increase your self-confidence. It will then be obvious to you that you do not need to do more. Little by little, the void will disappear to make way for your true personality, that's the good news.

So don't hesitate: dive into the real world and get to know yourself well!