

Overcoming
Your **OCD**

by Margaret Auguste, LMFT



A Therapy Assignment Workbook

Overcoming Your OCD

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Between Sessions Resources
Norwalk, CT, USA

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by Margaret Auguste, LMFT

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Disclaimer: This book is intended to be used as an adjunct to psychotherapy. If you are experiencing serious psychological symptoms or problems in your life, you should seek the help of an experienced mental health professional.

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About the Series

Between Sessions Resources publishes a variety of worksheets and other tools designed to be used as therapeutic homework. *Overcoming Your OCD* is one of a series of workbooks designed to help people practice the psychological skills they learn in therapy.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

ASSESSMENT AND EDUCATION

Assess the Role OCD Plays in Your Life	1
Understand What Drives Your OCD Cycle	6
Name Your OCD	12
Write Your OCD Story	16
Use SMART Goals to Make Smart Choices	21

DEVELOPING AND NURTURING YOUR INTERPERSONAL STRENGTHS

Commit to Change	26
Create a Library of Your Values	29
What Would You Tell Your Friend?	33
Silence Your Inner Critic with Compassionate Reframing	36
Recognize and Appreciate Your Resilience	41

ACCEPTING AND APPRECIATING YOUR EMOTIONAL WORLD

How Do Avoidance Behaviors Impact Your World?	45
Face Your Fears with Acceptance and Commitment Therapy	48
Create a Fear Ladder	53
Understand That Responsibility Is Shared	57
Embrace the Unexpected	60
Transform Emotional Chaos into Serenity	66
Moderate Your Fight-or-Flight Response	74
Lighten Your Load Through Laughter	80

HARNESSING THE POWER OF YOUR MIND

Probable or Possible?	85
Own Your Thoughts	89
Challenge Your Illogical Thoughts	95
Welcome Mindfulness into Your Life	100
Mindfulness and Your Five Senses	105
Catch and Release Your Obsessive Thoughts	109
Imaginal Exposure	115
Rescript Your Intrusive Images	120

TECHNIQUES TO TRANSFORM YOUR BEHAVIORS

Put the Brakes on Your Compulsions	125
Reschedule Your Reassurance Compulsions	128
Curb Your Compulsions to Diminish Your Anxiety	132
Help for Your OCD Handwashing	135
Do-It-Yourself Exposure and Response Prevention Guide	139
Tools, Tricks, and Interventions for Your Contamination OCD	144
Change Your Procrastinating Behaviors	149
Alter Your Rituals	153
Embrace Your Imperfections	158

LIVING YOUR BEST LIFE

Forgive Yourself for Your OCD	164
-------------------------------	-----

FOR FRIENDS AND FAMILIES

Helper or Enabler?	169
Create a Family Contract	172

TOP TIPS FOR RELAPSE PREVENTION

176

INTRODUCTION

Obsessive-compulsive disorder impacts people of all ages and walks of life. It is defined by obsessive, uncontrollable, recurring thoughts, images, and impulses that are intrusive and unwanted, creating an unrelenting desire to escape from the subsequent anxiety that is evoked. These overwhelming feelings often compel people to engage in compulsive behavior that their OCD-driven thoughts trick them into believing will alleviate their anxiety—behavior that, paradoxically, only serves to strengthen it.

This workbook will help you explore and assess the role OCD plays in your world so that you can take back your thoughts and live the life you desire. You will gather your personal strengths, values, and passions to explore the skills you possess—skills that will further strengthen and heal you. You will stop fearing your own mind and emotions and begin to embrace what makes you unique, worthwhile, and interesting so that you can bring serenity instead of chaos into your life. You will discover the healing power of your own mind and how you can train your brain to focus on the sights, sounds, and feelings that are all around you so that your values and goals, instead of your OCD, will shape your thoughts and alter your behavior in a way that is consistent with your values.

Assessment and Education

The first section of the book, which focuses on assessment and education about OCD, will enable you to develop a strategy for articulating, planning, and reaching your goals.

Although there are basic manifestations common to all people with OCD, how each person experiences it is unique. In this section, you will write your own OCD story, bringing what you might have been hiding from yourself into the light. This exploration will allow you to discover how the different manifestations of OCD impact you so that you can personalize your plan, which is vital to learning how to alleviate your symptoms.

Developing and Nurturing Your Interpersonal Strengths

The second section will teach you just what you can accomplish with the right interpersonal tools, which include learning how to be self-compassionate, treating yourself as you would a friend, and celebrating your resilience and inner strength by committing to making the changes you would like to make.

You will be encouraged to look within to rediscover, improve, and strengthen the skills, values, and personal characteristics that define who you are so that you can learn to appreciate yourself. This process will empower you to develop a strong foundation within you that is composed of hope and faith in a better future where you can set goals for yourself and commit to change.

Accepting and Appreciating Your Emotional World

This section focuses on the realization that OCD is primarily propelled, sustained, and entrenched by your doubts and fears, which can vary from worrying that you or your family might get hurt, or that some other unknown disaster will take place if you don't obey the commands you are given by your OCD-fueled obsessions. These fears limit your life and are further entrenched by your feelings of shame and embarrassment regarding the horrible thoughts that are a constant assault on your values and can make you view yourself in a negative light.

You will learn to put a name to those fears so that you can separate your disorder from your authentic self. Naming and accepting your fears will allow you to embrace rather than fear the unexpected and see your emotions in a positive, healing light that brings serenity into your life, liberating you and expanding your views of yourself and the world around you.

Harnessing the Power of Your Mind

The fourth section will focus on exploring and changing how you experience your obsessions. Those who suffer from OCD often report that it is particularly debilitating to feel as though they are under constant attack by their own thoughts. The fight to control, stop, and escape from this horrific experience can be exhausting and often elicits feelings of hopelessness and despair that make it difficult to cope with this most devastating part of OCD. The techniques in this section can help you harness the healing power of your mind to explore and change the way you perceive your thoughts, allowing you to take them back from your OCD. Acceptance and commitment therapy will allow you to accept and understand your thoughts. Meditation and mindfulness practice will quiet your mind so that you can focus on what's important. With work and determination, your thoughts will uplift you, not bring you down.

Techniques to Transform Your Behaviors

The fifth section will help you design a plan to conquer your compulsions. People with OCD often report that they feel as though they are being held hostage by compulsions that cause them to lose countless hours away from their friends and family. You will learn strategies that can help you replace your harmful actions with helpful alternatives.

Living Your Best Life

This section will encourage you to forgive yourself for any feelings you have that lead you to blame yourself for your OCD. This forgiveness is important to restoring your emotional health and sense of well-being. This section will also teach you how to allow others into your life so that you can share your hopes and fears with those you care about and no longer fight your battles alone.

Top Tips for Relapse Prevention

In this section, you'll commit to remembering and appreciating what you have accomplished and learned along your journey so that you can maintain all the positive changes you have made.

ASSESSMENT AND EDUCATION

Assess the Role OCD Plays in Your Life

Objective: To determine how you are impacted by OCD by exploring your thoughts, actions, and experiences.

You Should Know

Many people have thoughts or see images that are upsetting or strange, but they are usually spontaneous, infrequent, and quickly dismissed. In contrast, OCD-fueled obsessions often consist of the same mental activity over at least a two-week period or more. This mental torment is usually accompanied by an extreme and overwhelming desire to stop or control these thoughts in order to alleviate the severe anxiety they provoke.

Compulsions are repetitive actions that people who suffer from OCD feel compelled to engage in to alleviate their anxiety. More often than not, they realize that these actions are unreasonable and even harmful but are still unable to stop themselves.

What makes OCD so difficult to comprehend and diagnose is the various ways that obsessions and compulsions can present themselves. Perhaps you don't quite know how to describe what you are experiencing, let alone how to make it stop. This assessment can help you explore your thoughts and actions, your accompanying emotions, and the physical sensations you experience.

Does This Sound Like You?

Amy saw the same frightening images and had the same disturbing thoughts over and over again at the most inconvenient times. She found herself engaging in repetitive actions to stop the images and thoughts. Somewhere deep within, she realized these actions were nonsensical and even somewhat dangerous, but she felt compelled to take them. Amy did not know how to describe what she was experiencing, let alone how to make it end.

What to Do

This activity will help you:

- recognize that the symptoms you experience are not unique to you but are universally experienced by others with OCD;
- recognize that your behaviors are symptoms of a disorder and not personal imperfections that stem solely from within you;
- learn what areas you could focus on to begin to manage your OCD;

- collect information that can help you to decide what steps to take next.

Circle the answer that most represents how you feel. If you answer “True” to at least two of the statements within a group of questions, you are most likely experiencing symptoms that characterize OCD.

Obsessions

1. The same thought appears in my mind repeatedly. True False
2. I have obsessed over the same thought for at least a two-week period.
 True False
3. I have thoughts and see images that are disturbing to me. True False
4. I find myself trying unsuccessfully to stop or control the distressing thoughts and images I experience. True False

How many of these statements did you circle as true? _____

Compulsions

1. I feel compelled to engage in repetitive behaviors in response to my obsessive thoughts.
 True False
2. My repetitive behaviors are all aimed at reducing the anxiety or mental distress derived from my obsessions. True False
3. I recognize that the compulsive acts I engage in are most likely not helpful to me, but I feel compelled to do them anyhow. True False

How many of these statements did you circle as true? _____

Contamination OCD

A fear of becoming contaminated or contaminating someone else with germs after coming in contact with real or imaginary unclean objects, places, or people.

1. I avoid touching certain things because of possible contamination. True False
2. I clean my living space excessively. True False
3. I wash my hands excessively. True False
4. I often take extremely long showers or baths. True False
5. I am overly concerned with germs and diseases. True False
6. I am afraid of going into hospitals. True False

7. I am afraid of coming in contact with people who seem to be dirty.

___ True ___ False

8. I am afraid of certain colors that I associate with germs or dirt. ___ True ___ False

How many of these statements did you circle as true? _____

Symmetry and Ordering OCD

The fear that negative consequences will follow or that harm will come to you or those you care about because objects are arranged or positioned in the wrong order and do not follow a certain pattern.

1. I must have certain things around me set in a specific order. ___ True ___ False

2. I spend a lot of time making sure that things are in the right place. ___ True ___ False

3. I notice immediately when my things are out of place. ___ True ___ False

4. It is important that my bedding be straightened out impeccably. ___ True ___ False

5. I need to arrange certain things in special patterns. ___ True ___ False

6. When other people rearrange my things, I get extremely upset. ___ True ___ False

How many of these statements did you circle as true? _____

Harm OCD

A fear of harming yourself, a loved one, or a stranger through deliberate or thoughtless acts.

1. I fear that I will blurt out inappropriate words at an inappropriate moment.

___ True ___ False

2. I worry that I will harm someone by making careless mistakes. ___ True ___ False

3. I worry about the fate of complete strangers. ___ True ___ False

4. I believe I have the power to keep people from harm. ___ True ___ False

How many of these statements did you circle as true? _____

Checking and Repeating OCD

A fear that manifests itself in the constant feeling that something bad will happen if you don't repeatedly check to make certain that everything is all right.

1. I frequently have to check things over and over again. ___ True ___ False

2. I have difficulty finishing tasks because I repeat actions. ___ True ___ False

3. I often repeat tasks in order to prevent something bad from happening.

___ True ___ False

4. I worry excessively about making mistakes. ___ True ___ False

How many of these statements did you circle as true? _____

Perfection OCD

Having an unrealistic and unhealthy obsession about performing tasks to a standard that is excessively high and impossible to reach.

1. I have an excessive preoccupation with past mistakes. ___ True ___ False

2. I fear making new mistakes. ___ True ___ False

3. I have constant doubts about whether I am doing something correctly.

___ True ___ False

4. I have very high expectations for myself and for others. ___ True ___ False

How many of these statements did you circle as true? _____

Magical Thinking or Thought-Action Fusion OCD

Believing that simply thinking about an action is equivalent to actually carrying out that action.

1. I believe that my thoughts can cause something to happen. ___ True ___ False

2. I believe that thinking about an unwanted event makes it more likely the event will happen. ___ True ___ False

3. I believe that my thoughts are dangerous. ___ True ___ False

4. I believe that certain numbers, colors, phrases, or actions are unlucky and can cause harm. ___ True ___ False

5. I believe that certain numbers, colors, phrases, or actions are lucky and are responsible for good things happening. ___ True ___ False

How many of these statements did you circle as true? _____

If you circled more statements as true than false in one or more sections, you should consider the idea that OCD symptoms play a large and impactful role in your life.

Reflection

Do you like the way your life has been going?

Do you feel confused and overwhelmed by the thoughts and feelings you've been having?

Do you want to address these thoughts but not know how to describe what you are experiencing?

Do you feel like you want and need to make a change in your life but don't know where to begin?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

Understand What Drives Your OCD Cycle

Objective: To better recognize, understand, and manage your symptoms by becoming educated about the OCD cycle.

You Should Know The OCD cycle is made up of several components. Learning what these components are and how they work together is crucial to understanding why you feel compelled to repeat the same unhelpful behaviors over and over again.

Triggers

A trigger can be anything that evokes a negative or distressing reaction within you. It can be a relentlessly intrusive thought, or a disturbing image flashing in your mind like a neon sign, warning of harm to yourself or the people you care about. It can be an object like a door handle or a fork, a place as scary as a cemetery or as innocuous as a classroom. It may not mean anything to anyone but you.

What makes the triggering event unique is the meaning you give to it. For example, a door handle might just be a door handle to someone else, but your OCD will tell you repeatedly that the door handle is infected with contagious germs. An empty classroom on its own may mean nothing, but you might become triggered because your OCD tells you that the seats are not in the proper order, or that there aren't the right number of seats, or even that someone has colored in red marker on the desk and that color means danger or blood.

Obsessions

The meaning your OCD gives to these varied triggers gives them a sense of importance and power that turns them into obsessions, which are defined as the persistent, disturbing preoccupation with an often-unreasonable idea or feeling that you believe must be acted on.

Compulsions

The desire to control or stop the disturbing thoughts and images you see often becomes so overwhelming that you might find yourself feeling compelled to engage in actions that your OCD tells you are necessary to end the obsessions. You might find yourself washing your hands over and over, counting or rearranging items, or avoiding places or people in a futile effort to ease your anxiety.

Emotions and Physical Sensations

The emotions and physical sensations that accompany your obsessions and compulsions can help increase the intensity of your OCD cycle, keeping it in perpetual motion. Exploring and understanding your emotions and physical experiences and how they impact and influence your OCD cycle is crucial to your recovery.

Emotions: Your obsessions can be further strengthened and propelled by an assault of emotions—for example, fear, anger, frustration, or disgust—that lead to an overwhelming sense of shame, embarrassment, and hopelessness. As your obsessions generate more intensity, you start to feel a growing, sometimes overwhelming, sense of anxiety.

Physical Sensations: The false sense that you are in danger or that those you love are in danger is fueled by anxiety-driven bodily sensations that fool you into thinking that the fear or impending sense of doom you feel is real and imminent, and that you must do something about it right away.

Relief

The sense of accomplishment and satisfaction you feel at repeating a behavior aimed at ending your OCD as well as the overall sense of peace and relief can be intoxicating, deluding you into feeling that engaging in compulsions is the answer.

Repeat

However, even if you fight to control your fears or escape from them, the roots of your fears don't go away. You will recognize that this relief is only temporary, as your doubts and fears start to grow again, continuing the vicious cycle.

Does This Sound Like You?

LaShawn often wondered why he felt the overwhelming need to engage in compulsive acts that didn't really make any sense to him. He also wondered why after completing the acts he immediately felt such a sense of freedom, which seemed to dissipate just as quickly as it had come.

What to Do

In this activity, you'll track your OCD cycle for a week in order to get a full picture of your unique cycle. You'll identify the triggers, obsessions, and compulsions that make up your cycle so that you can clearly see the relationship that exists between them. Understanding the OCD cycle—what it is, how it works, and how it impacts your life—can help you better manage your OCD symptoms and increase your sense of personal autonomy.

Monitor Your OCD Cycle

Make a list of your triggers. These can be events, places, objects, numbers, colors, people or any other triggers that are unique to your experience.

Make a list of your obsessions: the images or thoughts that intrusively appear in your mind.

List any behavior you feel compelled to engage in order to relieve the anxiety you feel from your obsessive thoughts.

Using the checklists that follow, identify the emotions and physical sensations that exist within you as you are experiencing your cycle. These feelings provide the fuel that powers your OCD symptoms, often serving to give those symptoms more weight than they deserve.

Emotions

Place a check next to any of these emotions that overwhelm you during your obsessions or that seem to trigger your anxiety. Use the blank lines to add others you experience.

- | | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Anger | <input type="checkbox"/> Hopelessness | <input type="checkbox"/> Shame |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sadness | <input type="checkbox"/> Loneliness | <input type="checkbox"/> Isolation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fear | <input type="checkbox"/> Jealousy | <input type="checkbox"/> Bitterness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disgust | <input type="checkbox"/> Annoyance | |

Physical Sensations

Place a check next to the physical sensations you experience. Use the blank lines to add others.

___ Racing heart

___ Sweating

___ Chest pain, tightness, heaviness

___ Feeling hyper and filled with energy

___ Difficulty seeing

___ Upset stomach

___ Feeling dizzy and/or light-headed

___ Weakness in major muscles,
especially the legs

___ Numbness and tingling in the hands
and feet

___ Dry mouth

___ Labored breathing, feeling short of
breath, hyperventilation

___ Hot and cold flashes

Now, track your OCD cycle for a week.

OCD Tracking Form

Day and time	Triggers	Obsessions	Compulsions	Physical sensations	Emotions
Monday					
Tuesday					
Wednesday					
Thursday					
Friday					

Day and time	Triggers	Obsessions	Compulsions	Physical sensations	Emotions
Saturday					
Sunday					

Reflection

How did exploring the relationships between all the various elements increase your understanding of your OCD cycle?

What do you think impacted your urge to engage in your compulsions the most: your emotions, your physical sensations, or your thoughts? How will that information assist you in managing your OCD?

What do you think it would look like if you could find a way to break your cycle?

How do you think breaking your cycle could impact your need to engage in compulsions?

What did you learn about yourself by exploring your OCD cycle?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

Name Your OCD

Objective: To visualize your problem as a separate external entity rather than internalizing it as a problem that defines you.

You Should Know

Narrative therapy is committed to externalizing your problems instead of internalizing them by helping you recognize that *you* are not *your problem*. This type of therapy allows you to recognize, appreciate, and focus on your resilience and sense of self-worth—assets that have allowed you to survive and thrive as best you can under conditions that are difficult to navigate. It inspires you to come from a place of strength that is within you, drawing upon your hopes, dreams, skills, and values to guide you through a difficult time.

Naming the problem is a technique developed within narrative therapy. The emphasis placed on how you speak about your relationship to a problem is key to your ability to feel positive and hopeful. For example, when you say to yourself, “I am depressed” or “I am an angry person,” you recognize the emotional punch that is detrimental to you instead of being life affirming. This recognition allows you to fully separate yourself from a problem, rather than defining yourself as the problem, thus preventing the problem from strengthening the troublesome narrative you use to describe your life.

Does This Sound Like You?

Maria often described herself as a flawed person who was obsessed, compulsive, and unable to cope with the world around her. She wanted something better for herself but believed strongly that her problems were so incapacitating that there was not much hope in making any lasting changes in her life.

What to Do

Naming your OCD will allow you to see yourself as a whole person with many facets, instead of viewing yourself through the negative lens of your OCD. Creating this separate identity will allow you to

- accept and own the role the problem takes in your life;
- voice your problem using language in a way that transforms it into a singular thing that is manageable and not overwhelming;
- objectively examine your relationship to your problem so that you decide for yourself what role you would like it to play in your life;
- be angry at or critical of the problem instead of yourself as an individual;

- transform the problem into an entity that can be visualized and understood.

Follow these steps to create a name for your problem:

1. Think of how you visually see the problem unfolding.
2. Think of the emotions the problem evokes.
3. Think of how you would physically describe the problem.
4. Write a sentence or two describing how you experience the problem.

Choose from these examples or make up your own unique name.

Anger

Volcano: I am angry like a volcano building slowly and erupting, hurting and burning everyone in its path.

Cobra: My anger is like a cobra. I feel it quickly, and it strikes without warning.

Lightning rod: My anger rises quickly and is bright like a lightning strike, and then just as quickly it is over and I regret it.

Depression

Blanket: It feels comfortable and safe at first, like a familiar blanket, but eventually it feels smothering and heavy, holding me down, holding me back.

OCD

Jailer or warden: It keeps me captive and forces me to do its bidding.

Prison: I am trapped in a place I can't get out of.

Monster or bully: My OCD is like an evil being in a nightmare that chases me and always catches me.

Obsession

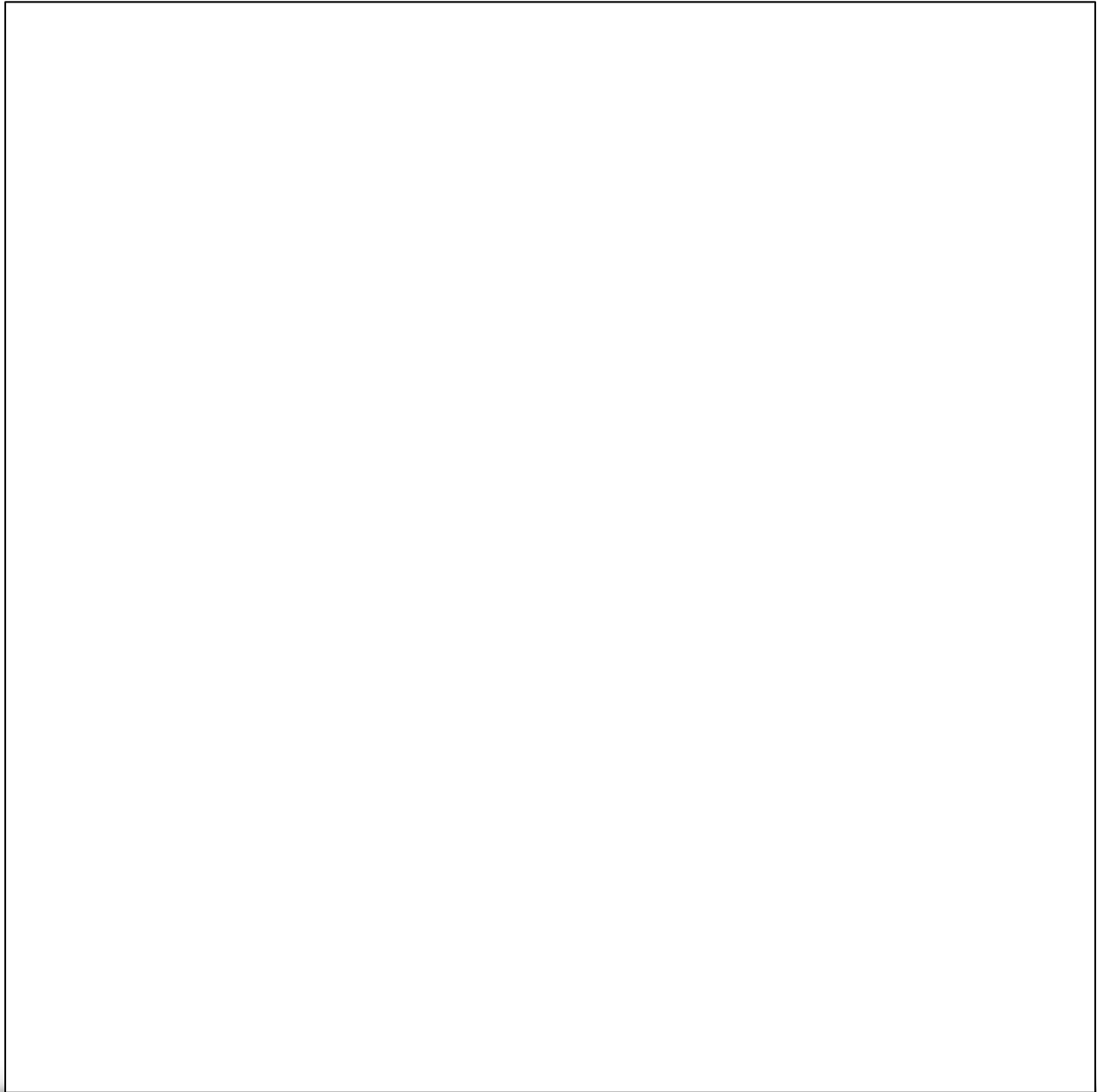
Fly: My obsessions are like flies constantly bothering me.

Bee: My obsessions are like bees constantly buzzing in my ear.

Compulsion

Hamster: My compulsions are nonstop, like a hamster on a treadmill.

Boulder: Sometimes I am unable to stop myself from engaging in my compulsions. When they start, the pressure becomes too great to resist, like a boulder rolling down a hill.



Reflection

How did it feel to visualize your problem on paper instead of allowing it to dominate your thoughts?

How did it feel to separate your problem from yourself instead of internalizing it?

Was it easy or difficult to think of a name for your problem? What emotions did the process evoke for you?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

Write Your OCD Story

Objective: To explore your thoughts and feelings about the role OCD has played in your life by creating an OCD narrative.

You Should Know

People with OCD often spend years struggling to understand and define an illness that is hard to pin down, hard to diagnose, and even more difficult to address because their dominant narrative is one of problems, limits, and hopelessness.

Narrative therapy uses the power of storytelling to transform the often negative and narrow stories your OCD encourages you to tell about yourself into an alternate story that reflects a more positive framework which takes into account a wide array of experiences and emotions.

Telling your story is a great way to begin the momentous task of liberating yourself from your OCD. It takes bravery and perseverance to examine both the positive and negative aspects of what makes you a whole person with honesty and integrity. After years of doing everything possible to avoid facing what you fear the most, it may seem almost impossible, but the benefits of slowly taking stock of your life instead of mindlessly rushing from one thing to another, of taking the time to organize your thoughts and feelings, can help you grow personally and emotionally so that you can more clearly see your future.

Does This Sound Like You?

Patrick found himself inundated with his obsessive thoughts, which had been part of his life for so long that couldn't really remember a time when he had ever been free of them. Even when he was with family and friends, Patrick often found himself feeling alone with only his disturbing thoughts for company.

What to Do

Creating your own OCD story can help you recognize and understand the role OCD has played in your life, enabling you to establish or reestablish your identity and shape your purpose in the world. Remember that, especially when you are describing your relationship with OCD, the stories that you tell about yourself are not stagnant but are, in fact, just the opposite. They are evolving, with multiple endings and possibilities.

Use the following story map questions to create your story. Whether you use the name you created for OCD in the preceding activity or simply call it "OCD," refer to it as if it were a separate entity from you. Write your story in the first person; for example: "I notice that I am ..."

Opening Narrative

Reflect on how the problems began and what you noticed about how your life began to change.

- When did I first notice that the problem was a part of my life?
- How did I behave when I first noticed the problem?

Dominant Narrative

Recognize what it has been like to live your life defined by the rules of the problem.

- How did my life change once the problem asserted itself?
- What does the problem tell me to do?
- What do I believe the problem says about my character and values?

Enabling Openings

By recognizing those moments when you are not experiencing symptoms, you increase your realization that you are not defined by your problem.

- What is it like during the moments when I don't see myself as the problem?
- What do I think it would take to make more moments when I am actively working toward not seeing myself as the problem?

Future Narrative

Imagine a future where your problem does not define your life.

- How would I prefer my life to be?
- What did I learn about myself during the times when I was able to live my life as I preferred?
- What would I tell the problem to do if I could?

Expanded Narrative

Imagine how expanding your story could also serve as a catalyst for allowing your life to grow and change.

- What would I like my life to look like?
- What actions do I want to commit to that would help me lead the life I prefer?

Putting Your Narrative Together

Take a look at Patrick's example:

(Opening narrative) *During high school, I first began to notice that I felt very anxious around objects other people could possibly have touched. Every time I ate in the school cafeteria and used the school's utensils, I worried that I was contracting a deadly flu that would kill me. I loved art classes but eventually stopped taking them because I was not allowed to bring germ-free paintbrushes and colored pencils from home. Eventually, I began to anticipate the sick feeling I knew would come from being around dirty items and just did what I could to avoid it. I never told anyone what I was feeling. I just let them think I had lost interest in art.*

(Dominant narrative) *I changed from being outgoing and carefree to being guarded and suspicious. My OCD told me that I needed to avoid dirty items at all costs or I just might die. It also told me to wash my hands repeatedly to get rid of any germs I might have contracted despite my efforts, and to change my clothes several times a day to avoid transferring germs I might have picked up. I pretended that I would rather be alone and turned down invitations to sleepovers and movies because I could not control my contact with germs. I went to online college instead of going to art school because I could not risk the exposure to germs. I felt like I had to sacrifice myself to protect the health of others who might be infected by me.*

(Enabling openings) *I don't like my behavior and recognize that it is probably ridiculous, but I don't know how to stop. However, there are moments when I am lost in the joy of jogging or drawing that I forget my obsessions and compulsions for a short time. I wonder: If I focused more on what I like and the goals I want to reach, would I not worry so much about germs?*

(Future narrative) *I want to tell my OCD to leave me alone. I want to live my life freely, without the constraints of worrying about germs all the time. I would tell my OCD that I want to go to art school with other artists and share my love of art. I want to touch the paintbrushes and be with other people unafraid of germs. I also realize that when I am jogging I feel strong, capable, and independent, unlike how I feel when I am obsessing over germs. When I am drawing, I feel inspired and talented and realize that I am capable of creating amazing things. I can commit to finding a way to re-create those feelings more often. I realize that I am much more than my OCD, and I can commit to reminding myself of that every day.*

(Expanded narrative) *I am going to step outside of the story that I have told about myself to take at least ten minutes every day to commit to engaging in an activity that I used to enjoy and that OCD has taken away from me. I am going to commit to increasing the time spent doing things that I love more and more each week.*

What does your expanded story say to you about your values and ideas about your life that your OCD does not?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

Use SMART Goals to Make Smart Choices

Objective: To successfully address your OCD symptoms by learning how to use SMART goals.

You Should Know

Goals define your life whether they are unconscious or conscious. They shape your relationships, your education, what you want to achieve at work, and how you approach life. Setting goals can give you a picture of how you would like your life to be. Yet, in order for you to succeed at achieving your goals, they should be reasonable, relevant, and reachable. Otherwise, you may find yourself feeling even more helpless and hopeless, making it even harder for you to gather the courage to try again.

The SMART approach is specifically designed to turn your goals from lofty ideals to measurable, clear goals that are attainable and specifically address your needs, so that you have a much better chance of achieving them.

Does This Sound Like You?

Tristan often found himself thinking “Today I’m going to stop thinking about the house catching on fire because I forgot to turn off every light” or “Today I’m going to stop checking the locks on the windows and doors over and over again because I know that it is not helpful.” Every time Tristan found himself giving in to his obsessions and compulsions, he became more despondent and resigned to his fate.

What to Do

Develop SMART goals to address, manage, and resolve your OCD symptoms. SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-bound. You can set your own SMART goals by using the following prompts:

Specific: Goals should be specific so that you know exactly what you are working toward. Write down the overall goal you would like to achieve. Break your overall goal down into manageable pieces that are simple and small.

Not helpful	Helpful
I will stop avoiding touching used eating utensils.	I will try to touch a dirty fork at least once a day.

Measurable: Goals must be identified in such a way that you can see, hear, or feel that you have been successful. Plan how you want to measure the goals you have decided to work on. Do you want to use a clock, a calendar, or a behavior log or chart? Do you want to measure your goal by hours, weeks, or days?

Not helpful	Helpful
I want to stop washing my hands until they are raw.	I will use a clock to time how long I wash my hands and will try to wash them for a shorter period each day.

Attainable: Is your goal realistic? Is it possible? It is important to narrow down your goal to something that you can realistically achieve and be successful at. Think about potential obstacles that might impede your progress, and strategize ways to address whatever obstacles you identified.

Not helpful	Helpful
I want to stop being afraid that touching dirty objects will give me a disease.	I want to be able to touch an object that had been on the floor without engaging in a compulsive act.

Relevant: Make sure that the goal is appropriate for your lifestyle and will be useful to you. Review your goals to make sure they match the issues you are trying to address.

Not helpful	Helpful
I want to be able to lose weight and improve my appearance so that I can stop being afraid to visit the mall.	I want to be able to stop fearing the images I see of people dying whenever I think about entering any of the mall entrances without first saying a prayer and counting backward from fifty.

Time-bound: Make sure that you set aside enough time to work toward your goals. Plan ahead so that you can consider when you would have enough time to take all the steps you'll need.

Not helpful	Helpful
I should be able to cure my OCD-fueled fears by the end of the week so that I can drive myself across town.	I will set aside at least three weeks to practice challenging my fears on a regular basis.

Setting SMART Goals

Practice setting SMART goals by completing this chart. Start by writing your overall goal here:

Specific List the smaller steps to your overall goal.	Measurable How do you plan to measure it?	Attainable Is this goal achievable?	Relevant Is it useful to you?	Time-bound When do you plan to complete this step by?

Tips

- If you find you have trouble reaching your goal, revise it rather than giving up.
 - Break it down even further.
 - Make sure it is concrete and simple.
- Even if you accomplish only part of your goal, reward yourself.
 - Go to dinner.
 - Plan for a movie.
 - Engage in any other fun activity you like.

- Give yourself enough time to reach your goals.
 - Don't rush through your plans.
 - Take time to plan your strategies.
 - Don't give up if things don't immediately go your way.
- Be kind to yourself.
 - Don't criticize yourself if you have to revise or change your goals.
 - Laugh at yourself a little, and resolve to try again.
 - Recognize and celebrate the evidence of your resilience and dedication toward making an effort to change your life.
 - Seek support from a family member or friend.

Reflection

What has your past experience been with trying to meet a goal you set for yourself?

How would you define success in terms of meeting your goal?

When you think back on trying to meet your goals, what strategies worked well for you? Which did not work so well?

How do you think setting SMART goals could increase your chances of successfully reaching your goals?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

DEVELOPING AND NURTURING YOUR INTERPERSONAL STRENGTHS

Commit to Change

Objective: To explore making positive changes in your life by pledging to actively work toward your goals.

You Should Know

Human beings are by their very nature creatures of habit, and react with anxiety, discomfort, and uncertainty in the face of change. For example, imagine yourself getting dressed in the morning at home. You have your routine set and go through it, probably without much thought. Now imagine yourself when you are staying in someone else's home or at a hotel. You probably feel a little anxiety as you struggle to learn where things are and how they work, as well as searching through your bag to locate all the supplies you rely on to make your mornings comfortable and to prepare you for the day.

Even positive events that are welcome, like a new baby or a new job, still elicit some anxiety and discomfort as you work toward acclimating yourself to the changes they will bring. No matter whether it is positive or negative, change can be frightening and it demands a lot of you.

However, acknowledging these difficult feelings and working through them by committing to doing whatever it takes to overcome your OCD and to accept new possibilities in your life will be cathartic and empowering.

Does This Sound Like You?

Raina dreamed that her life would be better if she were not under the influence of OCD. However she felt frightened whenever she thought of how much work it would take to begin her journey and also wondered what her life would look like if she did not fill her days thinking about her OCD.

What to Do

Making a commitment toward your treatment by pledging to work through whatever challenges your OCD presents is an important step. In this activity, you'll:

1. create a commitment statement using the prompts that are provided for you;
2. add your own statements that reflect your unique needs;
3. read, recite, record, or take a picture of your pledge as often as you think you need to remind yourself what you have to gain from making a change in your life.

Here are several examples of commitment pledges:

- I commit to giving up on being who OCD tells me I am.
- I commit to focusing on what is good and positive about myself and my life every day that I am taking on this difficult undertaking.
- I commit to doing whatever it takes to make the changes I know I need and want to make in my life.
- I commit to embracing my fears instead of trying to avoid them.
- I commit to sometimes feeling uncomfortable while facing my symptoms.
- I commit to being patient with myself as I try out new and unfamiliar strategies and interventions.
- I commit to forgiving myself for any setbacks or mistakes I may make on my journey.
- I commit to taking the time for rest and relaxation so that I have the energy necessary to complete the tasks I set for myself.
- I commit to allowing myself to receive the emotional support I need to help me throughout my journey.
- I commit to rewarding myself every day for trying to change my life.

Write your own:

I commit to

I commit to

I commit to

I commit to

I commit to

Reflection

What do you stand to gain from pledging to try opening yourself up to a new way of thinking?

Think of a time when you committed to some positive change in your life, no matter how small. What was the experience like for you? What would have made it better for you?

What did saying the pledge you created mean to you? How did it impact your ability to commit to your goal?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

Create a Library of Your Values

Objective: To focus on your values instead of your OCD by recognizing how important they are to you.

You Should Know

Although it may seem like your life is consumed by unremitting disturbing thoughts and actions that are often the complete opposite of your beliefs, know that your OCD does not define or determine who you are.

Your values—core beliefs created from your desires, self-image, and experiences, and garnered from your parents, family, and friends, are what define you. Your values give a special meaning and direction to your life, often serving as a guide for you to follow when making decisions that are important to you.

However, those who suffer from OCD often discover that their values, the parts of themselves that are most cherished, are perpetually under siege by the alarming and relentless content of their thoughts, causing them to constantly say to themselves, “I must be a bad person if I have such evil and unacceptable thoughts”—and eventually to believe it. This belief creates an internal mental anguish that occurs when people have disturbing thoughts that are the complete opposite of their true values.

OCD latches onto the things that are most important to you. You could have several intrusive thoughts, and you might not pay attention to most of them. However, the ones that go against your values will shake your belief in yourself and who you are.

Remembering, celebrating, and concentrating on who you truly are by focusing on your values or what you hold dear can help you take your power back and reclaim your life.

Does This Sound Like You?

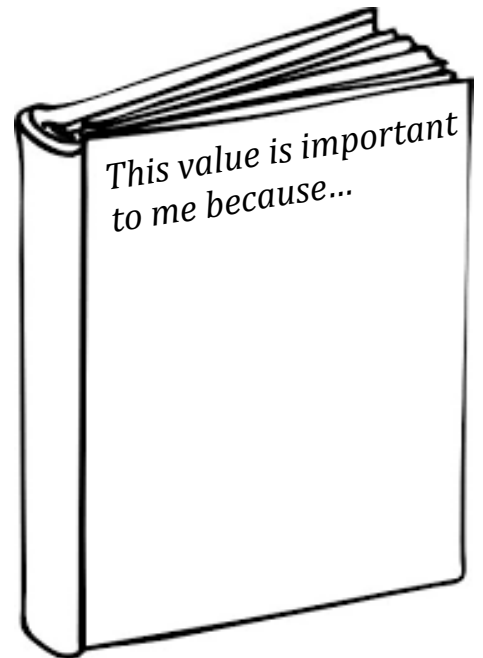
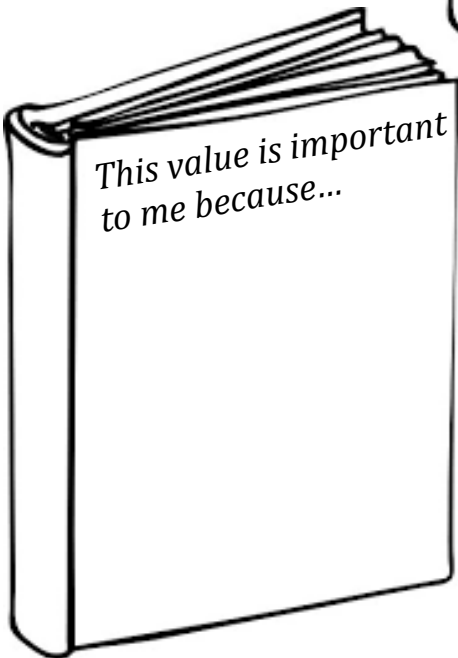
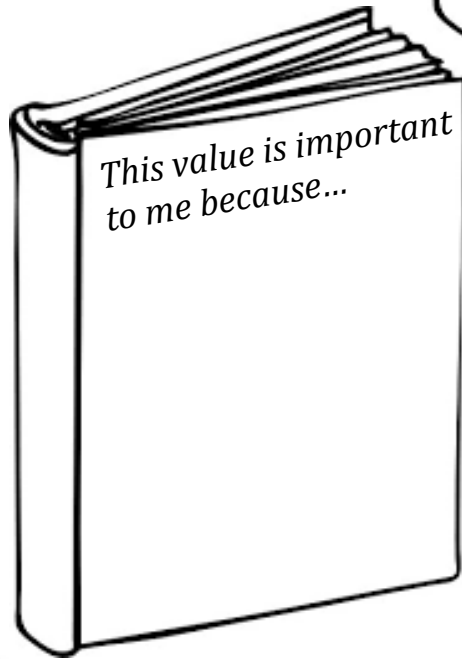
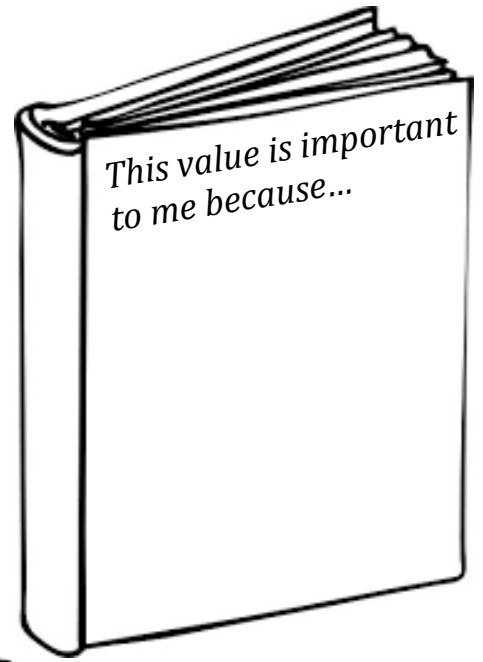
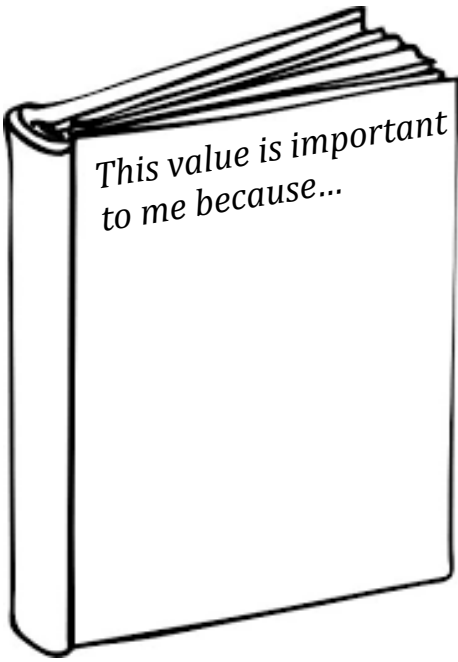
Tanya had always considered herself a person who valued honesty. However, she often lied to her family, telling them that she was too tired to go to restaurants and other fun public places with them because she was terrified that they would die if she did not recite certain numbers and phrases in the right way. The constant fear and embarrassment she felt regarding her predicament made her feel depressed and wonder who she really was.

What to Do

Imagine that your values are like your most treasured stories, ones you enjoy because they resonate deep within you in a way that is comforting and satisfying. Create your own personal library, where you can go whenever you feel the need to remind yourself of who you are and what is really important to you.

1. Choose five or more of the most important values from the list to create your library, or write your own if you prefer.
2. Write each value on the spine of one book.
3. On each book cover, write why this value is important to you.
4. Take a picture of the books you have created.

Achievement	Friends	Patience
Adventure	Fun	Peace
Beauty	Generosity	Popularity
Calmness	Grace	Power
Caring	Helping others	Purpose
Charity	Honesty	Reason
Civility	Honor	Recognition
Class	Humor	Relaxation
Compassion	Independence	Respect
Compromise	Innovation	Responsibility
Confidence	Inspiration	Safety
Connections	Joy	Sharing
Courage	Kindness	Spirituality
Creativity	Knowledge	Stability
Drive	Loyalty	Success
Fairness	Nature	Trust
Free time	Optimism	
Freedom	Parenting	



Read the values you have listed:

- when you are thinking obsessive thoughts;
- when you are thinking of completing a compulsive act;
- when you are thinking negative thoughts about yourself.

Reflection

How has OCD impacted your ability to adhere to your values?

What does it feel like to reflect and focus on what you value as opposed to what your OCD tells you to value?

How do you think that knowing and appreciating your values will help you challenge your OCD?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

What Would You Tell Your Friend?

Objective: To strengthen your sense of self-worth by learning to feel compassion for yourself.

You Should Know

What is the first thing you do when someone you care for confides that they feel bad about themselves? For example, suppose they made a mistake at work and were reprimanded; perhaps they weren't invited to a party and were feeling lonely and unwanted; or what if they blame themselves for hurting someone's feelings, or feel incredibly guilty because they inadvertently caused an accident? You would no doubt feel compassion for that person. The first thing you would probably do is comfort them by using soothing words. The second thing would be to assure them that they were still a good person, just one who made a mistake or experienced a temporary setback.

The question for you is, can you honestly say that you treat yourself with the same consideration and compassion that you so readily give to the people you care about? The answer is, probably not. The power OCD has over you stems directly from its ability to eat away at your self-worth by constantly wielding negativity as a weapon against you. You feel angry and disgusted at yourself for the ugly thoughts and visions you are bombarded with. You then feel compelled to engage in ridiculous and unhelpful actions that you know in your heart and mind are not useful. However, your OCD tells you that you are a horrible person who does not really care about people if you don't engage in the compulsive acts. The end result is that you give in to the compulsions, feeling weak and helpless, remaining in the cycle of negativity.

To break this cycle, learn and practice the art of self-compassion. Self-compassion means that you stop avoiding or escaping your emotional pain and instead learn to acknowledge how difficult your situation is, while thinking about how you can care for and comfort yourself during difficult times. You simply pledge to show yourself the same empathy, love, and care that you naturally feel and show toward others and commit to practice loving yourself, caring for yourself, and forgiving yourself as a way to counteract the false message that OCD is giving you.

Does This Sound Like You?

Matthew was known among his friends as someone they could count on whenever they needed advice or support. However, he never seemed to be able to give himself the same consideration, often berating himself for making mistakes and redoing the same tasks over and over again to make sure that everything was completed to perfection. Every time he found even one mistake he felt angry at himself, knowing that he never did anything right.

What to Do

Draw from the deep well of goodwill and empathy that you feel and exhibit toward others to tap into a boundless source of compassion that you can then extend to yourself. Compare and contrast how you hear yourself speaking and responding to the pain of others with how you usually respond to yourself.

Visualize yourself helping a friend who needs your support.

What feelings does seeing your friend trigger in you? (For example, immediate concern? Feelings of warmth? Disgust?)

What do you say? (Something comforting? Friendly? Angry?)

What tone do you use? (Harsh? Soft? Gentle?)

How might you reference their past? (Draw on their strengths? Point out past mistakes?)

What would you predict might happen in the future? (Learn from mistakes? Make the same mistakes again?)

Now visualize yourself going through a difficult time. What feelings does thinking of yourself going through your difficult time trigger in you?

What do you say to yourself?

What tone do you imagine yourself using?

How might you reference your past?

What would you predict might happen in your future?

Reflection

What would it look like if you spoke to yourself the way you spoke to someone else who was in a crisis?

What has this activity taught you about the relationship between self-compassion, weakness, and strength?

How might your life change or remain the same if you acted with self-compassion toward yourself on a regular basis?

Imagine that you made a plan to treat yourself with kindness every day. What would that plan look like?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

Silence Your Inner Critic with Compassionate Reframing

Objective: To act with compassion toward yourself by learning how to reframe your negative thoughts.

You Should Know

Self-criticism is a common characteristic of OCD. People with OCD often report that their negative thoughts act as an inner critic who constantly berates and bullies them into completing compulsive acts that only serve to hurt them emotionally, socially, and sometimes physically. This negative emotional process becomes automated to the point where you are unaware of how much your definition of yourself remains rooted in criticizing yourself for your perceived weakness.

Instead, commit to being self-compassionate. Self-compassion means extending kindness to yourself in the face of personal failures, problems, or other disappointments. Silence your inner critic by reframing your negative thoughts with compassion. Allow this expanded interpretation to take root, to make room for a more nuanced and balanced approach to defining yourself in ways that open you up to other possibilities.

Pledge to being just as kind and understanding to yourself regarding your own self-perceived inadequacies or mistakes as you would to someone else who was going through a difficult time or feeling bad about themselves. Realize that no one, including you, is perfect! Cherish and celebrate your imperfections; they are what make you part of the human race. Know that you will fall short of your ideals, you will be frustrated with yourself and disappointed at times, but this is true of all of us.

Compassionate reframing can:

- help you unlock new opportunities and explore other possibilities that might be advantageous;
- be more closely aligned to your value and belief system than to your fearful narratives;
- allow you to see your fears in a continuum, where your thinking is not absolute but is instead framed with choices and hope;
- provide you with a “focus” that encourages you to be present and that will help and not hinder your progress.

Does This Sound Like You?

Anna’s inner voice often told her that she was thoughtless and weak because she couldn’t send a simple email without making mistakes in grammar, and that she must be lazy and not care if she couldn’t be bothered to check over her email again and again until she could barely see.

Mona felt that she was disgusting and uncaring when she admitted that her hands were raw and painful from all the constant handwashing she believed she must do to keep her family safe.

What to Do

It's important to recognize what words you use when you are being critical of yourself. This could be difficult, as your inner critic might be so ingrained in your daily experience that you perceive it as normal and commonplace.

In the column on the left, circle the words you use to negatively describe yourself. For example, do you find yourself using the same phrasing repeatedly, such as, "I am so clingy," or "I am so disappointing"? In the blank spaces provided, add other words and phrases that you also find yourself using.

Self-Criticism

demanding
disappointing
clingy
embarrassed
a planner
fearful
anxious
dependent
different, weird
oversensitive
uncomfortable, intense
impulsive
indecisive
out of control
loud
perfectionist
quiet
rigid
shy

Self-Compassion

leader, organized
honest, true
loving, concerned
perceptive, self-aware
detail oriented
profound, sensitive
eager, enthusiastic
determined, loving
unique, special
sensitive, subtle
perceptive, observant
spontaneous
careful, considerate
spontaneous
assertive, positive
precise, exact
discreet, respectful
standards, ethics
inner directed

As you read the words aloud or imagine yourself using the words you have chosen, what tone of voice are you using? Is it cold, harsh, loud, piercing, pounding? And how does that tone influence how you feel when you use the words?

In what ways do the words you use to describe yourself uplift you or bring you down?

How do the words you use to describe yourself reflect or dispute your values?

How might your feelings be different if you chose to use more positive words to describe yourself?

Create Your Own Compassionate Reframe

Using the more compassionate descriptions listed in the column on the right, reframe the words and phrases you have circled. Expanding on these negative words to include a more well-rounded and nuanced description of your behavior will allow you to be more accepting of and at peace with yourself.

Two examples have been provided to get you started.

Self-Critical: <i>perfectionist, embarrassed</i>	Self-Compassionate: Reframe: <i>careful, perceptive</i>
<i>I am perfectionist, and I am embarrassed and worry that the correspondence I write is full of mistakes that make me look stupid. I am obsessed with checking my work over and over.</i>	<i>I value the quality of my work and am very perceptive of how my work defines me. I am careful to make sure that my work reflects my respect for my personal goals and expectations.</i>

Self-Critical: <i>indecisive</i>	Self-Compassionate Reframe: <i>careful, considerate</i>
<i>I am often indecisive and cannot leave my home for hours until I have made sure I have turned off every light to ensure that my home does not catch on fire.</i>	<i>I am very concerned and considerate of my family and want to make sure that they are safe and taken care of. I am sometimes overly careful because of my concerns.</i>

Self-Critical:	Self-Compassionate Reframe:

Self-Critical:	Self-Compassionate Reframe:

Self-Critical:	Self-Compassionate Reframe:

Self-Critical:	Self-Compassionate Reframe:

Reflection

How did this exercise help you unlock new opportunities and explore other possibilities that might be advantageous?

In what ways did the exercise help you become more closely aligned to your values and belief system than to your fearful narratives?

How did the exercise facilitate your ability to see your fears in a continuum, where your thinking was not absolute but was instead framed in choices and hope?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

Recognize and Appreciate Your Resilience

Objective: To gain confidence in yourself and your ability to conquer your OCD by learning to recognize and appreciate your resilience.

You Should Know

Solution-based therapy is an approach that appreciates personal resilience. This approach recognizes that everyone has some knowledge of what would make their life better, as well as the ability to create solutions. Sometimes people who are in the midst of working through tough situations just need to be reminded of how strong they are.

This therapy focuses on your strengths instead of your weaknesses by reminding you to think of and appreciate how you cope with your difficulties, by asking questions like “How have I managed to carry on?” or “How have I managed to prevent things from becoming worse?”

You may be exhausted from checking twenty times to be sure that your lights are turned off before you leave the house, or from remembering to say the Lord’s Prayer exactly right numerous times to ensure the safety of your family, but somehow you push through it and live your life. Even figuring out the complex rituals and compulsions you engage in takes ingenuity and planning. You might spend hours completing them perfectly—while still managing to put your children to bed on time.

You may be surprised to know that this is what resilience looks like. Resilience is the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties. It is a particular inner strength that characterizes many people with OCD who persevere under the most difficult circumstances.

Does This Sound Like You?

Petra often described herself as disorganized and incompetent because it took her so long to get herself and her children ready for school, because she had to complete so many rituals before she felt safe enough to leave her home in the morning. However, even though she felt terrible she realized that somehow her children got to school every day, totally unaware of how worthless she felt about herself.

What to Do

This activity will help you recognize and appreciate your resilience.

1. Using the chart that follows, write down things you have been able to accomplish or ordeals or problems you have overcome in spite of your OCD.
2. Reflect on what personal strengths were required for you to achieve each. For example, did you manage to make breakfast even though your forks and spoons were not lined up

exactly right? This achievement might take determination and resolve. For ideas, you can use the list of strengths that follows.

3. Include how you felt, every small piece of satisfaction or happiness at your achievement.
4. If you like, share your chart with someone who is supporting you along your journey. You could ask them to think of an accomplishment you have not included, perhaps because you forgot about it or didn't even think of it as an accomplishment.
5. Make a copy of the chart, and keep it with you to look at whenever you are feeling despondent or need to remember what your goals are and how committed you are to your recovery.
6. Add to the chart every chance you can.

Ambitious	Focused	Persistent
Analytical	Forceful	Persuasive
Appreciative	Generous	Practical
Artistic	Grateful	Precise
Authentic	Helpful	Problem solving
Caring	Honest	Prudent
Charming	Hopeful	Respectful
Clever	Humble	Responsible
Communicative	Humorous	Self-assured
Compassionate	Idealistic	Self-controlled
Confident	Industrious	Serious
Considerate	Ingenious	Socially intelligent
Courageous	Integrity	Spiritual
Creative	Intelligent	Spontaneous
Dedicated	Kind	Straightforward
Determined	Knowledgeable	Strategic
Disciplined	Leadership	Tactful
Educated	Lively	Team oriented
Empathetic	Modest	Thoughtful
Energetic	Motivated	Thrifty
Enthusiastic	Observant	Versatile
Fair	Patient	Warm
Flexible	Persevering	

Your Resilience Record

Accomplishments	Strengths	How you felt
<p><i>Example: Yesterday I could not stop myself from checking the rearview mirror several times for fear that I hit a dog. I was so upset at the possibility of hurting a dog that it was very hard for me to drive but I managed to work through the anxiety in order to drive my children and their friends to school.</i></p>	<p><i>Flexible, disciplined, team player</i></p>	<p><i>I felt angry and yet impressed with myself. I don't think I ever gave myself a chance to recognize how my determination to take care of my kids somehow gives me the strength to overcome my fears.</i></p>

Reflection

How did it feel to focus on what you are successful at rather than what is wrong in your life?

In what ways were you surprised to learn how resilient you actually are in the face of adversity?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

ACCEPTING AND APPRECIATING YOUR EMOTIONAL WORLD

How Do Avoidance Behaviors Impact Your World?

Objective: To stop avoiding the places, people, and objects that you fear by identifying your avoidance behaviors.

You Should Know

Do you avoid going to shopping centers because your OCD tells you that you might catch a disease? Do you insist that your spouse or friends drive because you obsess that you might run over and kill someone? Do you refuse to go out to dinner because your intrusive thoughts tell you that someone might harm you? Have these fears added something wonderful or taken something intangible away from your life?

You might not recognize these behaviors as compulsive acts, but in actuality they are. Compulsions are usually thought of as obvious acts, such as having to clean the house incessantly, to check locks, or to wash hands. However, compulsions can take on various forms and are defined as any act that is performed as a result of an irresistible urge to behave in a certain way, especially when it is against one's conscious wishes.

Avoiding places, objects, and people because your OCD convinces you that it will somehow keep you safe is such an act. The immediate sense of liberation you gain from believing you are protecting yourself and your loved ones from harm is intoxicating. However, know that sense of freedom will just as quickly begin to disintegrate and the uncertainty as to whether you really are safe will soon begin to increase again.

In the long run, you will find that your sense of fear will only be strengthened, because you never give yourself the opportunity to test your own resilience to withstand uncomfortable moments or to learn if your conclusions about what is safe or not are accurate.

Does This Sound Like You?

Tom avoided going to shopping centers because his OCD told him he might catch a disease. Jasmine avoided going out to dinner with her friends or family because she was afraid to use public bathrooms. Brian's intrusive images showed him pictures of himself harming his family, even though he knew he would never actually do such a thing.

What to Do

Using the chart that follows, acknowledge the places, people and animals, objects, and situations you avoid to alleviate your anxiety. Use the examples provided or create your own

Reflection

How do you feel that your avoidance behaviors have limited or expanded your approach to life?

Which category of avoidance behaviors did you engage in the most, and in what ways do you think having that information could benefit you?

In what ways is your life worse or better since you began to engage in avoidance behaviors?

What did your life look like when you were not engaging in various avoidance behaviors?

What would your life look like now if you did not feel compelled to engage in avoidance behaviors?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

Face Your Fears with Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

Objective: To learn how to manage your fears about your OCD instead of avoiding them.

You Should Know

First and foremost, OCD is a disease that is created and maintained by fear. In fact, many people with OCD report that this paralyzing fear that consumes and shapes their lives is like a vicious circle or trap they can't escape from, and that it is often the most difficult aspect of their illness to overcome. You fear your own mind, which is filled with both unwelcome and disturbing thoughts. You fear losing control of yourself and saying or doing things that are totally against your values. Worst of all, you fear that you are responsible for terrible things that might, just might, happen to those you love, to yourself, and even to complete strangers, solely due to your thoughts and actions.

Imagine you did something different, something that on the surface seems ridiculous; crazy, even. What if instead of trying to control your reaction to a frightening image that you can't unsee, or to avoid a thought that is abhorrent to you, you were mindful of your fears, facing them, speaking them out loud, and accepting them as something that merely makes you human. What if you acknowledged your difficulties and the role fear has played in your life? What if you embraced your perceived weaknesses, while also acknowledging your strength and resilience in surviving while under their control?

Of course, our natural tendency as human beings faced with overwhelming fear is to fight against it by trying to control it. However, this approach only serves to increase the symptoms of OCD, as the fear only temporarily subsides.

Drawing upon the teachings of mindfulness, acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) recognizes that suffering stems from the tendency to escape or avoid pain instead of facing it, a disconnection from the present, and an attachment to negative thoughts that you mistakenly think define you. This dissatisfaction is intensified when you base your actions on these fears instead of basing your actions on your values and what you deem is healthy and necessary to build the life you truly want.

Does This Sound Like You?

LaShonda was very frightened of touching anything that could possibly carry germs, such as door handles, escalators, elevator buttons, or anything else that could carry disease. Her fear was triggered by the visions she saw of her children covered in sores and dying painful deaths due to her neglect. LaShonda was so fearful that she had begun to engage in various compulsive acts in order to calm her anxiety and fears.

What to Do

One of the major principles of ACT is to accept your reactions and be present with them, no matter how disturbing they are. Practicing acceptance may at first make you feel very anxious, but being able to tolerate your anxious feelings by fully experiencing the sensations, thoughts, and emotions that accompany your fears is the first step toward decreasing the power your fears have over you.

Place a check by the fears that you recognize as dominating your life. Begin your journey to take back your power from OCD by being honest with yourself no matter how painful. Feel free to use the ones from the list or to write down ones that are unique to your experience.

- | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| _____ disappointment | _____ being misunderstood |
| _____ embarrassment | _____ hurting others |
| _____ failure | _____ losing control |
| _____ feeling anxious | _____ not being perfect |
| _____ becoming dependent | _____ pain |
| _____ being different | _____ rejection |
| _____ being hurt | _____ seeming stupid |
| _____ being uncomfortable | _____ the unknown |
| _____ loneliness | Other: _____ |
| _____ making a decision | Other: _____ |
| _____ making a mistake | Other: _____ |

Choose at least three fears or more from your list and, using the prompts that follow, write about how they have impacted your life. As you write, try to meet these goals:

- Observe what you are experiencing without reacting to it.
- Let your emotions or thoughts happen without giving in to your compulsion to act on them.
- Recognize the difficulty that experiencing these fears has made in your life without judging or criticizing yourself.
- Give yourself permission to be fearful.

My fear of _____ has stopped me from going to the following places I would like to go:

My fear of _____ has made me afraid to try the following things:

My fear of _____ has caused me so much anxiety that I have resorted to the following activities in order to reduce my anxiety:

My fear of _____ has impacted my relationships at home, at work, or at school in the following ways.

My fear of _____ has influenced my plans for the future in the following ways:

My fear of _____ has impacted my life by:

Reflection

How well were you able to observe and not react to what you are experiencing?

How well were you able to allow your emotions or thoughts to happen without reacting to your compulsion to act on them?

Were you able to recognize how your fears have affected your life without judging yourself?

What do you think would happen if you were you able to give yourself permission to be fearful?

How did it feel to acknowledge and accept your feelings of anxiety?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

Create a Fear Ladder

Objective: To overcome your OCD by learning to face your fears step by step.

You Should Know

It is completely normal to want to avoid the thoughts, images, and situations you fear. In fact, that sixth sense you have that signals danger can even be helpful and serve to keep you safe from harm; for example, if someone dares you to do something you know is dangerous and should be feared, like approaching a wild animal. However, your OCD can trick you into taking even the simplest everyday event, such as leaving your home, driving a car, or seeing the color red, and twisting it into an idea that leaves you terrified and anxiety ridden.

You can face these fears by exposing yourself to situations that are less scary to you and then working your way through even scarier situations. Think about what it was like to learn how to swim or ride a bike. You didn't jump into the water right away or ride down a busy street the first day. You probably dipped your toes into the water, then practiced putting your face in, or had someone hold you on the bike at first way before you began riding it alone.

Now, imagine the process of overcoming your OCD-driven fears as a ladder you have made the difficult decision to climb. Reaching the top might appear to be overwhelming, even unimaginable. However, if you take your time, mastering one rung at a time as you climb higher and higher, you will eventually succeed and make your way to the top, out of the reach of your fears.

Does This Sound Like You?

Mary had been afraid of seeing the blood from cuts and scrapes because she thought it was unclean. Now her fears were starting to extend to anything that contained the color red: crayons, clothing, and any other red item. Mary was worried that her fears were increasing instead of decreasing and found herself becoming even more fearful of even the possibility of seeing or touching the color red.

What to Do

Follow these steps to help you face your fears.

1. Think of a goal you would like to achieve regarding overcoming your ultimate OCD-driven fear.

Example: My goal is to overcome my fear of *being afraid that I am going to catch a deadly disease from being in contact with objects that people I don't know have touched* so that I can use a public bathroom without feeling afraid that I am going to die.

Rank your fears from the lowest at the bottom to the highest.

Fears: thoughts, situations, images, places, other	Fear rating
	Highest
	Lowest

Reflection

How did rating your fears from what you fear least to what you fear most impact the way you usually experience them?

How do you think you would react to exposing yourself to your lowest-rated fear and then working your way up to the top?

Describe how you felt in the past when you overcame a fear, such as swimming, riding a bike, or speaking in public. What strategies did you use, and how did they help you overcome your fear?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

Understand That Responsibility Is Shared

Objective: To meet your obligations in a way that is driven by your values and not by your OCD, by relieving your overinflated sense of responsibility.

You Should Know

Like many people with OCD, you may suffer from an overinflated sense of responsibility for others' well-being. The associated guilt causes your anxiety level to intensify to the point where you have to escape from your feelings by engaging in compulsions. The compulsions then provide you with a sense of temporary certainty that your loved ones are safe and you are not a horrible, uncaring human being.

It is important to recognize that you are not solely responsible for your family, friends, and community. Acknowledging that others share this responsibility does not mean that you are shirking your obligations. You can create a positive reframe for your thoughts to suggest that you care about your loved ones so much that you are gathering a wide range of resources to help you meet your obligations in a more effective and inclusive manner.

Does This Sound Like You?

Since childhood, Leslie had always felt a heightened sense of responsibility. She had worried about her pets, toys, and family. This feeling intensified as she got older and began to obsess over her belief that harmful consequences would befall her family and that she was the only one with the power to prevent those negative consequences from occurring.

What to Do

You most likely always think that your responsibility is 100 percent. However, for the purposes of this exercise, you will imagine what it would look like if you shared the responsibility with others.

1. Write down something you fear will happen that you are solely responsible for preventing or resolving through acts you are compelled to engage in.
2. Make a list of all the other reasons that also could be responsible for your fears coming about.
3. Calculate the percentage that each person or event could possibly be responsible for, making sure that you don't go over 100 percent.
4. Look at your results and calculate what percentage is your responsibility after you have acknowledged that other factors may be involved.

Fear	Other reasons fear could come true	Likelihood that this reason is responsible
<i>Example: My son will have a bad day at school if I don't complete all my morning tasks in groups of three before he goes to school.</i>	<i>He was nervous about his math test.</i>	<i>20%</i>
	<i>He had an argument with another child while riding the school bus.</i>	<i>20%</i>
	<i>He had a disagreement with his best friend.</i>	<i>30%</i>
	<i>He missed a goal shot in soccer.</i>	<i>15%</i>
	<i>He played poorly during orchestra practice.</i>	<i>10%</i>
		<i>Your responsibility: 5%</i>

Shared Responsibility

Fear	Other reasons fear could come true	Likelihood that this reason is responsible
		<i>Your responsibility: __%</i>

Reflection

What do you stand to gain or lose by solely taking on all the responsibility for keeping everyone you love safe?

What do you stand to gain or lose by allowing others to share the responsibility with you?

How do you think it impacts your OCD to realize that you are not solely responsible for what happens to those you care for?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

Embrace the Unexpected

Objective: To increase your tolerance for the unexpected and decrease the anxiety you feel surrounding uncertain situations by reframing the role uncertainty plays in your life.

You Should Know

Uncertainty is a universal part of life, wide-ranging and unavoidable. People feel concerned about the impact of global issues, such as terrorism or climate change, and are uncertain about what the future holds. The experience of uncertainty can be intensely personal and can involve the anxiety surrounding the birth of a child, a medical diagnosis, or the results of a job interview. It can also involve the mundane, where you find yourself fretting over whether your favorite football team will win, or if the shoes you're buying will match the dress you have at home.

What is not universal is the way people interpret and react to uncertainty. People without OCD can have all these experiences and may feel some anxiety. They may even feel somewhat overwhelmed and afraid; however, their feelings are fleeting and not overpowering. Those with OCD might feel distraught over these competing uncertainties and engage in compulsions to ease their anxieties.

Think about some uncertainties that are already in your life but that you take for granted and are able to tolerate; for example, when you start a new project at work or drive to a new destination. What makes those situations tolerable in comparison to others? Think about times when uncertainty has been a positive part of your life; for example, presents that were a surprise, an unexpected hug from a loved one, or your child's first step or word.

As you learn to tolerate uncertainty, you can try reframing it in order to expand the way you interpret it.

Does This Sound Like You?

Mary Katherine was uncertain that her children who were away at college were safe. When the uncertainty became too much, she would call them over and over again, questioning them about safety precautions. Michael was uncertain about the knives that were in the kitchen. He constantly worried that if he touched one the wrong way he would inadvertently stab his wife and kill her. His fear increased to the point where he was afraid to even enter the kitchen out of concern over what would happen.

What to Do

These are some common traits of those who experience a strong sense of uncertainty. Place a check next to the traits you recognize in yourself.

- _____ Seeking reassurance
- _____ Making extensive lists
- _____ Compulsively checking and rechecking everything
- _____ Procrastinating
- _____ Refusing to delegate tasks or allow anyone to help you
- _____ Having to plan every vacation and every other event you are involved in
- _____ Looking for an exorbitant amount of information about every event, problem, or activity you want to engage in

Exposure and response prevention therapy (ERP), the best-known treatment for OCD, consists of gradually exposing yourself to your fears over a period of time. In this activity, you will expose yourself to situations that make you feel uncertain, until you feel less and less anxiety. Engaging in the exposures will allow you to acknowledge and accept your fear of recurring uncertainty so that your anxiety surrounding these situations will decrease significantly.

Start by asking yourself these questions:

What are some disadvantages you experience as a result of your inability to tolerate uncertainty?

What are some advantages to tolerating uncertainty, and what do you specifically have to gain from learning to tolerate uncertainty?

Next, follow these steps:

1. Make a list of uncertain situations that cause you anxiety. You can choose from the examples provided, and/or add situations that are unique to you.
2. Rate the situations on a scale from 1 to 10, according to your anxiety level.
3. Expose yourself to one or more situations a week. Use the weekly exposure sheet to track your progress.
4. Engage in the exposure at least three times per week.
5. Repeat the exposure until your anxiety level drops to a 2 or below.
6. Increase your exposure tolerance by inventing new and random situations to expose yourself to.

Uncertain Situations List

- Go to the grocery store without a list.
- Ask a friend to choose a movie for you both to see, without telling you its title.
- Fix a meal and eat your dessert first.
- Fix breakfast for dinner or dinner for breakfast.
- Have a friend or family member buy an item of clothing for you, and then wear it.
- Read the first book of a series you want to read; don't read the sequel for two weeks.
- Take a different driving route to work.
- Make a simple dish without using a recipe.
- Go to a restaurant and order something you have never eaten before.
- Eat at a type of restaurant new to you.
- Jog without counting your steps or miles. Continue until you feel like it is time to stop.
- Go on a short errand without wearing something you always wear: earrings, makeup, your favorite shirt, or a lucky watch.
- Write an email or a text to a friend. Send it without checking it for grammar or anything else.

Weekly Exposure

	Uncertain situation	Anxiety level before exposure	Anxiety level after exposure	Notes on experience
Day 1				
Day 2				
Day 3				
Day 4				
Day 5				
Day 6				
Day 7				

Reflection

Was tolerating uncertainty easier or more difficult than you expected? In what ways?

Did most of your exposure practice turn out positive? If so, did that surprise you?

When your exposure practice did not work as expected, how did you cope with it?

What do you think it would look like if you incorporated uncertainty into your life on a daily basis?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

Transform Emotional Chaos into Serenity

Objective: To better understand and manage your OCD-fueled emotions by creating a visual representation of your emotions.

You Should Know

OCD-triggered emotions are usually negative and create an innate sense of danger combined with various competing and conflicting emotions to produce an internal brew of chaos mixed with fear. This toxic mix is what compels you to engage in impulsive and compulsive actions in an impassioned but unproductive effort to somehow relieve all those overlapping and overwhelming feelings.

Mandalas can be used to create a visual representation that will allow you to better manage your emotions and act upon them in a way that is driven by what you value, as opposed to what your OCD-influenced emotions dictate that you do. They have been used since the beginning of time to tap in to the restorative nature of colors and shapes by symbolizing the wholeness of the person creating them, enhancing self-expression, insight, and healing. In fact, the word *mandala* means “circle” in Sanskrit and embodies the continually evolving landscape of life. They are usually circular but can be represented by other geometric shapes as well.

Mandalas can help you to

- use color to visually represent each distinct emotion you experience so that you can see all your emotions individually and as a whole;
- assert your independence and ability to manage and define your emotions in a positive way by choosing the colors that represent your emotions;
- understand how your feelings shift and evolve as you go about your day and how they change when they are defined by your OCD;
- create an alternate visual representation of how you would prefer your emotional life to look;
- train your focus inward so that you can practice being in the moment, allowing you to slow down, focus, and concentrate on your inner self.

Does This Sound Like You?

Audra felt an overwhelming sense of embarrassment and disgust that accompanied her fears that she might give her family a deadly disease because she failed to properly clean and decontaminate their home. Darrell felt a heightened sense of anxiety that compelled him to read his work over and over, petrified that he had misspelled words.

What to Do

To help you recognize and accept your competing emotional states, you will color two mandalas: an OCD-driven mandala and a values-driven mandala. As you color each mandala, follow these tips for mindfulness:

- Sit in a comfortable position in a quiet room.
- Take a few deep cleansing breaths.
- Start breathing slowly and evenly.
- Slowly begin coloring, allowing your hands and fingers to take control.
- Notice the feel of the coloring implement you are using.
- When you feel completely relaxed, begin focusing on each color. Continue to focus on each color until you finish.
- Slowly scan the whole mandala you have created, taking in what you have made.
- Finish by taking a few more deep cleansing breaths.

OCD-Driven Mandala

This mandala will represent your emotional state that is directed by your OCD. As you color, recognize how much your negative emotions, when directed by your OCD, can dominate and decimate your life. This endeavor might feel difficult at first, but accepting your feelings will be cathartic and allow you to understand them instead of fearing them.

Follow these steps:

1. Record your OCD-fueled emotions throughout the day over the course of a week.
2. Record what triggered each specific emotion.
3. Choose a color to represent each emotion. Use that color consistently as you complete your mandala.
4. Color your OCD-driven mandala.

Emotions Chart

Day	Trigger	Emotion	Color
Example:	<i>Touched a dirty fork</i>	<i>Disgust</i>	<i>Brown</i>
Day 1			
Day 2			
Day 3			
Day 4			
Day 5			
Day 6			
Day 7			



Values-Driven Mandala

The second mandala will represent your emotional state that is directed solely by what is truly important to you. It will depict how you feel when your emotions do not reflect the influence of OCD and how you would like to feel in the future. As you color this mandala, focus on times when you felt these positive emotions in the past and what it was like to feel free. Doing this should help trigger feelings of hopefulness and serenity, as you realize what is possible in the future.

1. Record your values-driven emotions throughout the day over the course of a week.
2. Record what triggered each specific emotion.
3. Choose a color to represent each emotion. Use that color consistently as you complete your mandala.
4. Color your values-driven mandala.

Emotions Chart

Day	Trigger	Emotion	Color
Example:	<i>Went for a walk in the park</i>	<i>Happiness</i>	<i>Yellow</i>
Day 1			
Day 2			
Day 3			
Day 4			
Day 5			
Day 6			
Day 7			



Here are some ideas for using your mandalas:

- Compare and contrast the two mandalas whenever you are feeling overwhelmed by your OCD symptoms to remind you that you are more than just your OCD.
- Color one mandala a week to see if your positive emotions increase or decrease as you work to resolve your OCD symptoms.
- Put your values-driven mandala on your refrigerator, mirror, or somewhere else where you can see it and recall those serene, calming feelings every day.
- Take a picture of your values-driven mandala so that you can look at it when you are away from home and feeling anxious or negative emotions.

Reflection

How did you feel while completing each mandala?

Was one mandala easier to complete than the other? If so, why do you think that was?

What did completing the OCD-driven mandala teach you about yourself and your current emotional state?

How do you think you will be able to use your values-driven mandala as a tool to increase positivity?

How did completing the values-driven mandala remind you of who you are and what you want your life to represent?

How will you use the activity in the future to enhance your treatment progress?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

Moderate Your Fight-or-Flight Response

Objective: To understand the relationship between your physical sensations and your OCD and to help you to ease your OCD symptoms by integrating a body-scanning meditation.

You Should Know

The fight-or-flight response refers to a wide range of physical sensations that occur when you are in imminent danger. This response is natural, healthy, and necessary for survival. For example, it helps you spring into action if a bear appears in your path, if someone is chasing you, or if you see your children doing something dangerous.

If you suffer from OCD, you might find that these physical sensations often activate a false and unhealthy certainty that danger is imminent, fueling the OCD cycle by strengthening the belief that your obsessions have more meaning and power than they actually do, and triggering a compulsive response to escape or avoid those thoughts at all cost. When you are in the midst of this intense inner turmoil, you most likely agonize about the harm they signify is coming to you, your family, or those you care for. Your mind feels as though it is under siege. You then make decisions based on this chaos, instead of making mindful decisions based on your values or what is really meaningful in your life.

The body-scan meditation is a therapeutic tool that will teach you to maintain a moment-by-moment awareness and acceptance of your thoughts, feelings, body, and surrounding environment. You will learn to have your body move into restful awareness and to practice visualizing your body in a state opposite to how it feels when you are overwhelmed by anxiety. Although this meditation will enable your heart rate to slow down, your blood pressure to normalize, your breathing to slow, and your stress hormones to decrease, it is important to note that it is *not* a relaxation exercise. The goal is not to force yourself to feel relaxed but to invite all sensations, good and bad.

This meditation will help you to

- reduce your reliance on using your thoughts to negatively interpret your physical sensations;
- listen to what your body is telling you without judgment but with acceptance;
- stop trying to control, avoid, and escape your bodily sensations, which only results in increasing your anxiety level;
- appreciate and feel gratitude for your body instead of regarding it as the enemy;
- regain your sense of power over yourself, instead of feeling as though you are a prisoner of your mind and body;

- interrupt your destructive dependence on the rules dictated by your OCD cycle by becoming more mindful of your actions.

Does This Sound Like You?

Dara felt as though her heart were leaping out of her chest and began to sweat heavily as she quickly said the Lord's Prayer over and over again making sure that she did not miss one word. Laura looked at her children's messy sock drawer and began to hyperventilate and feel tingling in her fingers as she frantically arranged and rearranged the socks, hoping desperately to make them look just perfect.

What to Do

In this activity, you will monitor your physical sensations for a two-week period. You can do this daily, every other day, or in whatever time frame you think is necessary within the two-week period. Then you will practice the body-scan meditation daily for an additional two-week period, or until you become accustomed to practicing it.

To help you to become in tune with your body, continue to engage in the body-scan meditation on an as-needed basis.

Physical Sensations Diary

Before you begin practicing the meditation, the first step is to become aware of any physical sensations that both trigger the advent of your obsessions and compulsions and continue while you are being engulfed by them. Place a check by the physical sensations that are most familiar to you. If you experience any other sensations that are not listed, please add them to the list.

___ **Narrowed vision** (sometimes called "tunnel vision"): You temporarily lose some of your peripheral vision. It is as though you are looking through a dark tunnel or tube. During a crisis, this helps you ignore trivial data to laser focus on the crisis.

___ **Tense muscles**: As your body tenses up, it becomes very alert and prepared for a crisis.

___ **Intensified hearing**: Your ability to discern certain noises that represent danger to you becomes more intensified. At the same time, your body chemistry alters to protect your ears from loud noises.

___ **Cool, pale skin**: Blood flow to the surface of the body is reduced so that blood can be directed to areas that are being targeted, preparing you to be able to run and fight.

___ **Sweating**: In preparation for extreme physical activity, the body will automatically increase its body heat. This is why your body immediately begins sweating even before you have started any actual physical activity.

___ **Dilated pupils:** During a crisis, your pupils dilate to let in increased light, which helps to temporarily improve your vision, helping you survive.

___ **Shaking:** Your body produces more glucose and adrenaline to provide excess energy needed to deal with the emergency. The change causes your body to shake.

___ **Tingling/cold limbs:** Intense anxiety can divert blood from your hands and fingers and redistribute it to the heart and other areas that need it for coping with emergencies.

___ **Difficulty thinking:** In a crisis, overthinking can be dangerous. By making it harder to think, your mind helps you act more on instinct.

___ **Rapid heartbeat:** Your heartbeat speeds up to be ready to more quickly transfer blood to the areas of your body that may need it.

___ **Hyperventilation:** You begin to breathe more quickly to prepare for a fight.

___ **Dry mouth:** Blood flow to the digestive system is decreased so that the body's attention can be prioritized to focus on your safety rather than digesting food, which can wait until you are safe.

Other: _____

Physical Sensations Chart

Complete this chart to monitor your physical sensations over a period of two weeks. Rate your anxiety on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest.

Triggering event	Physical sensation	Anxiety level	What did your physical sensations tell you might happen?	What actually did happen?	Notes

Physical Sensation Practice Plan

1. Make a plan for yourself, noting when you plan on practicing, where you plan on practicing, and what you might need; for example, a blanket, a mat, special clothing.
2. After a few practices, try to focus particularly on the parts of your body that you notice are impacted when you are feeling anxiety provoked by your obsessions.
3. Be aware that you will notice thoughts and reactions as you practice. You may find yourself feeling bored, annoyed, or frustrated with your situation or with the meditation process itself. This is to be expected. It isn't a problem, and there's no need to try to alter or get rid of them. Just accept that they are there and that they are part of your life. After you acknowledge them, simply go back to whatever body part you are focusing on.

Body-Scan Meditation Practice

Practice the body-scan meditation on a regular basis to become more aware of your body. This meditation is first and foremost a mindful physical experience where you purposely become more in tune with what your body is doing, apart from how those sensations are interpreted by your thoughts.

1. Lie down on a comfortable but firm surface. Use a yoga mat, a blanket, or whatever feels comfortable to you. Begin by closing your eyes to help yourself focus. As you lie there, simply notice what it feels like to allow your body to become one with the surface beneath you. Observe what you sense surrounding you: the hardness of the floor beneath you, the scratchiness or smoothness of the blanket or mat you are lying on, the clothes on your body, or anything else your body notices.
2. Observe your natural breathing patterns, making sure to notice yourself exhaling and inhaling. Notice the rhythm, the feeling of your chest moving up and down, and the sounds of the air as it enters and leaves your body.
3. As you breathe in deeply, notice how it feels to have your breath fill up every space in your chest. Every time you breathe out, focus on one specific part of your body at a time, beginning at your toes and slowly working your way up to your legs, arms, hands, fingers and the rest of your body, part by part. Be aware of any changes or sensations without judging them in any way.
4. After you have scanned your entire body part by part, focus on your body as a whole, sensing its entirety and its physical sensations as one. Continue for a few minutes before opening your eyes.

You can engage in a more condensed form of the body-scan meditation while you are sitting at your desk or anywhere else without having to lie down, whenever you notice yourself reacting

to an event, person, or thought that begins to trigger your physical sensations. You can do this meditation anywhere and anytime to draw upon the sense of awareness and calm you have grown used to from your daily practices of your longer meditation.

Reflection

How did it feel to face your physical sensations proactively instead of passively reacting to them?

If you met any barriers while practicing the technique, what strategies did you use to overcome them?

Was paying attention to your bodily sensations and their relationship to your OCD helpful or unhelpful? In what way(s)?

How do you think you will try to continue to incorporate meditation into your life?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

Lighten Your Load Through Laughter

Objective: To counteract the negativity and stress of OCD by incorporating laughter into your life.

You Should Know

In the midst of your most annoying and disturbing obsessive thoughts and compulsions, do you ever suddenly visualize how ridiculous you must look, frantically running through the house turning lights on and off twenty times each, or crawling around on the floor meticulously placing all your shoes in an exact order? Even though what you are doing is presumably to save yourself or your loved ones from harm, do you ever stop to smile, even a little?

OCD is often fondly portrayed as cute and quirky by the media, when you know that it is everything but entertaining. OCD is a serious, often devastating condition that takes true commitment and perseverance to manage. However, that doesn't mean that those who have it can't appreciate the humor that exists within the experience of the disorder. You may be surprised to know that allowing yourself to acknowledge the absurdity of your situation might even alleviate the symptoms associated with OCD.

Laughter has been proven to have the following benefits:

Physical

- Boost your immune system
- Improve blood flow and circulation
- Reduce tension
- Reduce stress
- Decrease pain

Social

- Attract people to you
- Defuse conflict
- Strengthen relationships
- Increase communication

Mental

- Lessen depression
- Decrease anxiety
- Strengthen resilience
- Improve overall mood
- Increase a sense of hopefulness

Laughter can

- help you personify your OCD as a separate entity from you, one that you are in charge of defining instead of it defining you;
- make it easier to recognize that your OCD is not as important as it makes itself appear to be;
- encourage you to not take yourself so seriously by laughing at what you know in your heart are ridiculous activities;
- alleviate the sense of hopelessness and feelings of uncertainty;
- give you a break from only experiencing negative feelings by purposely increasing the positives in your life;
- alleviate the sense of stress and anxiety that usually accompanies OCD;
- remind you how good it feels to laugh and experience happiness.

Does This Sound Like You?

In the midst of her most annoying and disturbing obsessive thoughts, Melissa was shocked to realize just how ridiculous those thoughts sometimes were. Eva suddenly smiled during her therapy session when she shared with her therapist how funny she must look silently and frantically running through her house turning lights on and off twenty times.

What to Do

Complete the following exercises, which are designed to incorporate laughter into your life and can help you lessen the hold that OCD has on you.

Creating a Biography of Joy

This activity is adapted from the work of Jungian psychiatrist Verena Kast, who developed this innovative intervention in treating depression.

Laughter Meditations

Dr. Madan Kataria first began developing laughter meditation in the 1990s, when he became interested in the positive health benefits of laughter. He began a laughter club after he realized there were similarities between the breathing used during laughing and that of Pranayama, an ancient form of yoga that emphasizes focused breathing. The following exercises originated from his research.

These meditations incorporate four elements: stretching, laughing, smiling, and stillness. Practiced together or separately, these elements can help you put laughter and joy at the forefront of your life.

- *Smile Mask*: Look in the mirror and prepare to watch yourself smiling. Inhale slowly, counting to three and smiling widely as you do so. Exhale just as slowly, again counting to three. Repeat this exercise at least six times in a row.
- *Gradient Laughter*: Smile slowly as widely as you can. Begin to giggle and slowly transform the giggle into a laugh. Laugh as long and loud as you can.
- *Happy Memories Laugh*: Think of a time when you experienced a funny moment that caused you to laugh out loud, a time when you felt safe, loved, comfortable, and happy. Surround yourself with the images, sounds, smells, and sight of yourself laughing. Think back to how your laugh sounded and re-create that sound.
- *Thirty-Second Laughter*: Simply laugh out loud for thirty seconds. You can mix it up by laughing quietly or loudly, and even by practicing different laughs like an actor trying out for a part in a movie.
- *Humming Laughter*: Close your mouth with your lips loosely together. Hum to yourself, perhaps a well-known childhood song like “For He’s a Jolly Good Fellow” or “Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes.” As you hum, pay attention to the vibrations you feel.
- *Tree in the Wind Smile*: Smile as you inhale slowly, raising your arms and counting to three as you do so. When you exhale, slowly wave your hands and arms in the air as if you were a tree waving your limbs in the breeze.

Laughter works very well in a group setting. Watching everyone else do silly things makes the whole experience less awkward and even funnier. You could invite some of your friends or family to join you. If you have children, or have a close relationship to children, they might enjoy doing this activity with you.

Reflection

How did it feel to purposely insert laughter and joy into your life?

How did it feel to see your OCD as something to laugh at instead of something to fear and loathe?

If you were you able to recruit others into your laughter meditations, what was the experience like?

What do you think it would feel like to incorporate more laughter into all aspects of your life?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

HARNESSING THE POWER OF YOUR MIND

Probable or Possible?

Objective: To explore what it feels like to be more realistic about the likelihood of your worst fear coming true by using probability testing.

You Should Know

Just because something is possible does not mean it is probable. People with OCD are often consumed with the idea that a disaster will definitely happen if they don't act in a certain way. However, in their haste to prevent what might happen, they often don't take the time to realistically examine the possibility they fear. For example, it is *possible* that you could be struck by lightning, but statistically it is *not probable*. It is also *possible* that you could win the lottery, but statistically it is *not probable*. OCD can make it difficult to distinguish the difference between the two.

What if you applied the theory of probability to your OCD? Probability is the likelihood that an event will occur. Of course, it is always possible that your fears may be warranted, but is it probable? Most people with OCD usually imagine the worst outcome and act accordingly to prevent it. But think about this: If it is possible for the worst outcome to occur, it is equally possible for the best outcome to take place. For example, you most likely think that there is a 100 percent chance of your worst fear coming true if you don't engage in your compulsions, but the probability of it actually occurring is much, much smaller and highly unlikely. There are usually many other more positive possibilities that exist among the continuum of likelihoods that might occur.

It might seem silly and even difficult to act "as if" by forcing yourself to think of alternatives instead of what you fear most occurring, but remember that to be mindful means to slow down, not speed up. Take the time to truly experience whatever feeling or moment you are having and then to consider carefully, mindfully what step to take next. As you practice this new way of thinking, you will see just how OCD has trained your brain to experience fear, like a switch turning on and off. You have the power to also train your brain to slow down, to process, and to make decisions based on your ability to remember that it is the meaning that you give to thoughts that is important, and not the thoughts themselves.

Does This Sound Like You?

Nia was sure that she would give a terrible presentation at work and be fired immediately if she did not count to twenty backward, spell her name backward, and tap her fingers five times. However, Nia never took the time to consider what might actually occur if she did not engage in her compulsive acts.

What to Do

To help you visualize the concept that the worst scenario is not really very likely to happen (despite what your OCD tells you), you will think of ten different possibilities that expand on an outcome you would usually define as solely negative.

You will then choose from these possibilities ten times in order to calculate the probability of more positive outcomes occurring.

1. Begin by writing down your prediction: one negative outcome you obsess about and are sure will occur.
2. On nine strips of equal-sized paper, write down alternative outcomes that are also possible, from the worst to the best. (If you wish to, glue each strip onto a more solid surface, like cardboard or wood, or laminate them.)
3. Put the strips of paper into a bag (paper, gift, plastic, shopping bag, or whatever you have).
4. Shake the bag so that the strips are mixed up.
5. Draw one slip of paper from the bag and record what is on it as Trial 1.
6. Read the outcome to yourself slowly, taking the time to notice the sensations you have as you are reading.
7. On a scale from 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest), write down your anxiety level after you have read the result.
8. Put the slip back in the bag, shake the bag, and keep drawing again, putting each result back in the bag each time until you have drawn enough times to equal your total possibilities.
9. Using the formula for probability, calculate the likelihood of drawing a good outcome.

Your prediction: _____

Trial	Outcome	Anxiety level
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		

Calculate the probability of drawing a good outcome by dividing the number of good outcomes by the total number of outcomes:

Good outcomes ÷ total outcomes = result _____%

Reflection

How does expanding your thinking to include both positives and negatives feel different from or similar to your usual focus on a singular negative outcome?

What was it like to change your focus from one outcome to many outcomes?

How do you think expanding your expectations might possibly add to or detract from your life?

Was your anxiety level higher, lower, or the same when you drew a positive outcome? What do you think that means for how you experience your life?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

Own Your Thoughts

Objective: Diminish the power your thoughts have over you by learning to separate your interpretation of your thoughts from the actual thoughts themselves.

You Should Know

Have you ever imagined yourself engaging in some unthinkable, inappropriate behavior: standing up and screaming in a classroom where everyone is silent or walking by a fire alarm and pulling it? This is completely normal. Everyone has thoughts that are weird, unpleasant, and even disturbing at times. Most people will quickly have the disturbing thought and then just as quickly forget about it.

Most people define these type of thoughts as “good” or “bad” and then judge themselves as possibly being good or bad people based on the positive or negative meaning they apply to the thought. And most people would be tempted to fight against the thought by controlling it or trying to stop it altogether.

If you have obsessive thoughts, you might have a different experience, in which you not only can't let the upsetting thought go but also find yourself attaching personal meaning to it, elevating it to the point where your obsession becomes entrenched. Trying to control a thought or stop it are strategies that do not help stop obsessions and most likely make them stronger.

Instead, learn to regard the thoughts clinically, as facts that can be explored to determine their worth in shaping your life. Practice categorizing your thoughts that bother you not as good or bad but as limiting or expanding your life, encouraging or discouraging you to thrive and prosper, or as simply being helpful or unhelpful to you.

Does This Sound Like You?

Patrick valued his work at the local animal shelter. He had begun to obsessively think about whether he was somehow inadvertently poisoning the very animals he cared about, even though he had never done so and would not do so. Patrick hated himself for these thoughts and was so disturbed by them that he eventually stopped working at the shelter for fear of what his thoughts told him could happen.

What to Do

Create a thought interpretation notebook that will help you to

- recognize the power your thoughts have over you;
- separate your interpretation of your thoughts from the actual thoughts themselves, in order to diminish their power over you;

- judge your thoughts objectively to determine if they are healthy or harmful to you;
- reframe your thoughts so that they are more realistic and positive rather than negative.

To create your thought interpretation notebook, answer the following questions about each obsessive thought you have. You can use additional paper, if needed.

Obsessive thought: <hr/> <hr/>
What do I think my thought means to me? To my future? <hr/> <hr/>
How does this thought impact my life negatively or positively? <hr/> <hr/>
How do my negative thoughts make me feel about myself ? <hr/> <hr/>
How does the person I defined myself to be in the previous question compare to the person I know I really am? <hr/> <hr/>
If I look at my thought objectively, without any interpretation, how likely is it to come true? <hr/> <hr/>
If I did nothing about my thoughts, what realistically might or might not happen? <hr/> <hr/>
Thinking of my thought objectively, how could I reframe it in a more positive manner that is helpful to me? <hr/> <hr/>

Obsessive thought:

What do I think my thought means to me? To my future?

How does this thought impact my life negatively or positively?

How do my negative thoughts make me feel about myself ?

How does the person I defined myself to be in the previous question compare to the person I know I really am?

If I look at my thought objectively, without any interpretation, how likely is it to come true?

If I did nothing about my thoughts, what realistically might or might not happen?

Thinking of my thought objectively, how could I reframe it in a more positive manner that is helpful to me?

Obsessive thought:

What do I think my thought means to me? To my future?

How does this thought impact my life negatively or positively?

How do my negative thoughts make me feel about myself ?

How does the person I defined myself to be in the previous question compare to the person I know I really am?

If I look at my thought objectively, without any interpretation, how likely is it to come true?

If I did nothing about my thoughts, what realistically might or might not happen?

Thinking of my thought objectively, how could I reframe it in a more positive manner that is helpful to me?

Put your thought interpretation notebook to work for you!

1. To instantly evaluate your thoughts, take at least two of the most helpful questions and recite your answer to them every time you have a disturbing thought. Continue for a two-week period.
2. Use a simple two-minute meditation.
 - Close your eyes.
 - Breathe deeply in and out.
 - Imagine a group of gnats buzzing around you. As they circle your head incessantly, realize that they are annoying but harmless and that you can deal with them.
 - Now picture your disturbing thoughts as if they are noisy bugs flying at a distance. You can hear them, but they are essentially in the background. Imagine yourself ignoring them, focusing on something else more important.
3. Even though it might not feel comfortable at first, add some uncertainty to your usual response to your obsessive thought by asking yourself, “What might happen if I didn’t do anything about this?”
 - Allow at least five minutes to go by before you take any action.
 - Extend the time by an additional five minutes every time you have the thought, until perhaps you don’t feel the need to respond as usual at all.

Reflection

How did it feel to purposely separate your thoughts from your interpretation of those thoughts?

Did you feel as though the emotions you experienced enhanced or weakened the intensity of your interpretation of your thoughts?

What did your values tell you about yourself as opposed to the messages that your OCD-fueled thoughts give you about yourself? What would it look like if you interpreted your thoughts through that lens instead?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

Challenge Your Illogical Thoughts

Objective: To learn whether your interpretation of your thoughts is helpful by examining them honestly and objectively.

You Should Know

Magical thinking, also known as thought-action fusion, is an illogical thought pattern characterized by the linking of unrelated actions or events; for example, that it will rain all day if you don't say certain words in certain order, or that an earthquake will occur somewhere in the world if you don't take twenty steps backward.

The majority of people who experience magical thinking driven by OCD realize somewhere deep within that their thoughts may not have the power they fear. Nevertheless, the doubt and uncertainties that make them ask "What if" make them equally afraid of not following through with the compulsions their magical thinking orders them to do, for fear of harm coming to themselves, their family, or their friends.

The first steps toward mastering magical thinking involve understanding what it is, how it works, and how it impacts your life. Remember that just because you have a thought, even one that is very vivid and frightful, does not mean that it has meaning or is true. A thought is just a thought. It is not "good" or "bad"; it just is. What really matters is your interpretation of the thought. It can be helpful to think of any particular thought in this way: Would acting upon the thought convey your values or your anxiety and fears?

Does This Sound Like You?

Mara believed that her thoughts were extremely powerful and could prevent or cause feared events to occur. Donald was preoccupied or obsessed with numbers, colors, words, actions, or superstitions that he linked to fearful situations. Larissa believed that only by following certain rules, or by engaging in certain rituals and activities, could she prevent catastrophes.

What to Do

In this exercise, you will test the power of your thoughts by making predictions and recording the results; then you will judge your thoughts objectively.

Magical Thought Predictions

For one week, make a daily prediction based on one of these prompts and record the results. Even though it might feel ridiculous, take it seriously and spend at least fifteen minutes on each one.

- Take a paper clip, a pencil, or another small item. Place the item in front of you on a table

and practice moving it with the power of your thoughts.

- Use your thoughts to remove a stain from a piece of clothing.
- Use your thoughts to change your shirt from one color to another.
- Use your thoughts to turn a car alarm on or off.
- Try to correctly guess the card your friend pulls from a deck at least ten times in a row.
- Think of a secret word that you believe should cause something to happen and then silently say it to yourself to see what will occur.
- Predict that someone in your family, a friend, or someone at work will break a glass or coffee cup.

Use the power of your thoughts to try and make these predictions come true.

Predictions Record

	Predictions (Example: <i>My friend will break a coffee cup at lunch.</i>)	Successful	Unsuccessful
Prediction 1			
Prediction 2			
Prediction 3			
Prediction 4			
Prediction 5			
Prediction 6			
Prediction 7			

Judge Your Thoughts Objectively

List any thoughts you have that might be considered magical, either by you or by someone else.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Read this example, and then choose one of the thoughts you listed to evaluate objectively using these prompts. Use additional paper to evaluate other thoughts.

Example

Thought chosen: *If I tap the steering wheel six times before I start driving, my family will be safe.*

What is the evidence for and against a particular interpretation?

The evidence for it is that my family has not been in a car accident. The evidence against it is that I have never heard of any car accidents caused by thoughts.

Have I confused a thought with a fact?

I guess when I really think about it there are no facts I can see, touch, or hear that tell me that my actions are keeping my family safe from automobile accidents.

Are my interpretations of the situation accurate or realistic?

The interpretations feel accurate, but when I am writing them down or saying them out loud, I realize that they most likely could not happen.

Is my judgment based on feelings instead of facts?

Maybe. I get so upset at the idea of my family being hurt that it is hard to think about the facts.

Are there actions I could take that would help relieve my anxiety?

When I am worrying about school bus accidents, I could call the bus company and see what safety precautions they have the drivers take, what special driving tests they have to pass, and what their accident rates are.

What would a friend say to me?

A friend would probably be upset if they knew I was having these thoughts and would tell me that they were not realistic.

What would I tell a friend who had this problem?

I would tell a friend that they needed help and would support them in realizing that their thoughts are just thoughts.

Your Evaluation

Thought chosen: _____

What is the evidence for and against a particular interpretation?

Have I confused a thought with a fact?

Are my interpretations of the situation accurate or realistic?

Is my judgment based on feelings instead of facts?

Are there actions I could take that would help relieve my anxiety?

What would a friend say to me?

What would I tell a friend who had this problem?

Reflection

Looking at your chart, was there ever a time that your predictions came true?

What do you think it means about the powers of your thoughts if none of your predictions come true?

Thinking about your past, have any of your past predictions or thoughts come true?

What impact do you think your feelings have on how you interpret your thoughts?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of objectively evaluating your thoughts?

How do you think this exercise will help you process any negative thoughts you might have in the future?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

Welcome Mindfulness into Your Life

Objective: To bring mindfulness into your life by learning how to meditate.

You Should Know

Have you ever driven your car along a familiar route, going to school or work or to drop your children at day care, only to arrive not remembering how you got there? Have you ever promised yourself just a few pretzels only to suddenly realize that somehow you have eaten the whole bag? This is what it means to be mindless, to travel through life on autopilot, never stopping to recognize what is really important to you.

OCD is the embodiment of mindlessness. You find yourself being inattentive to the beauty, usefulness, and positive nature of your surroundings except to use them as an outlet to fuel your obsessive thoughts. You rush to engage in compulsive acts without reason or thought, in order to avoid or escape whatever you're fearful of, whether or not those fears really make sense to you. Your world is limited and narrow, as you feel powerless and devoid of hope.

Mindfulness means being attentive and aware of the thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations that are happening in your immediate environment. It means accepting all this information without judging it as right or wrong, bad or good. Being mindful allows you to function and grow along with the moment instead of flailing about in a past that you can't change or a future you cannot predict. People who are mindful take their time and allow themselves to appreciate every moment of their present.

Practicing mindfulness meditations will help when you:

- need to turn your attention away from worrisome fears and what-ifs and instead become attuned to the sensations, sights, sounds, and smells of what is taking place right in front of you;
- find yourself following an intrusive thought down to its usual conclusion of turning into a full-blown obsession;
- are at your wits' end with the unfound realization that you cannot escape the relentless disturbing images that are flashing in front of you;
- find yourself criticizing your past mistakes and transgressions;
- find yourself agonizing over a future calamity that you believe only you can prevent;
- find yourself desperately trying to stop yourself from engaging in some kind of unhealthy compulsive behavior.

You don't need to buy lots of fancy equipment or learn complicated words. You can sit, stand, or lie down with or without a yoga mat or cushion. You just need to commit to a set amount of time every day. To introduce mindfulness meditation into your life:

1. **Understand that your breath is important.** The focus is often on the breath because the physical sensation of breathing is universal and natural to everyone. It is the center of life. Always come back to focusing on your breath, no matter what else your thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations tell you to do.
2. **Know that the goal is not relaxation.** Mindfulness meditation does not equal relaxation. The goal is not to escape or avoid your pain but to observe it without attaching any meaning to it and move on from it by turning your attention to the present moment.
3. **Return and repeat.** It is natural for your mind to wander at first but simply recognize what is happening and return to your practice until you can focus for a longer period of time.
4. **Be nice to yourself.** Don't criticize your abilities. This is not a contest, and you don't win or lose by being the best or the worst. You win by becoming one with yourself and leaning in to your world as it currently is.

Does This Sound Like You?

Mary often started the day with the best of intentions only to look at the clock and wonder where the day went. Nora often drove her car along a familiar route only to arrive not remembering how she got there. Nick promised himself just a few chocolates only to suddenly realize that he had somehow eaten the whole box.

What to Do

Learn How to Meditate with the 4 7 8 Method

This method of meditation will help you to focus on what is taking place around you instead of mindlessly rushing through life. It can help you better cope with the difficult thoughts and feelings that cause you stress and anxiety in your everyday life and, as a result, manage your OCD better.

This meditation suggests sitting because that is where many people feel most comfortable as a beginning step. However, you can also lie down. Practice this exercise daily.

1. **Sit restfully.** Sit in a comfortable but firm chair that supports your arms and legs.
2. **Observe your legs.** Rest the bottoms of your feet on the floor. Feel the pressure of the floor pressing first against your heels, and then your toes.
3. **Straighten your upper body.** Sit straight but naturally. Don't force yourself.

4. **Observe your arms.** Rest your hands and arms where they feel the most comfortable and stretch your hands out, feeling the stretch in each finger.
5. **Rest your eyes.** You can close your eyes, or if you don't feel comfortable doing that, simply allow them to wander where they want to without force.
6. **Begin to breathe in and out.**
 - Exhale through your mouth.
 - Close your mouth and inhale for four seconds through your nose.
 - Hold your breath for seven seconds.
 - Exhale through your mouth for eight seconds.
 - Repeat least four times in a row.

When you're finished, slowly relax your focus and take a moment to notice any sounds in your environment, your thoughts, and your emotions.

Extend Your Mindfulness Meditation Practice

The following activities represent a variety of ways to integrate mindfulness into your everyday life. Experiment with them to find the ones that appeal to you the most.

Mindful Eating

People with OCD often act purely on their immediate feelings, which are fueled by their fears. This exercise will help you learn to pay attention to all the sensations you experience when you are engaged in an activity so that you can appreciate every detail of your present and lessen your need to act impulsively.

Take a small amount of food and eat it very slowly, taking time to

- see the food, paying attention to every detail, line, bump, or ripple;
- smell the food in order to build your awareness of what it might taste like;
- taste the food by chewing it slowly so that you experience the entire flavor;
- listen to the sound of yourself chewing or crunching to draw your attention to yourself and the power of your physical presence.

Mindful Observation

Take the time to become aware of your surroundings, to notice and appreciate the simple beauty of what is in plain sight, in a way you might not usually do. This exercise is particularly

helpful when you find yourself beginning to worry about the future in an open-ended and nonpurposeful way.

- Choose a natural object from your present environment (for example, a flower, rock, or puddle) and focus on it for a minute or two.
- Look at the object as if it were completely unknown to you, as if you were a young child seeing it for the first time. Be completely still and simply notice the details that make up the object. Watch for at least five minutes, or longer if your concentration allows. Try to increase the length of time each time you do the exercise.

Mindful Immersion

Choose a thoughtless, mundane, even tedious task that you complete regularly, and take the time to observe it carefully and with purpose. This practice is designed to promote an increased awareness and appreciation of simple daily tasks and the results they achieve.

- Select a task you do daily (for example, opening or locking doors, shutting off lights, turning off a faucet) or frequently (for example, laundry, washing dishes, washing the car).
- At the very moment you engage in this task—putting your hands in the dishwasher or folding one towel—take the time to be mindful of each individual step and to consider where and how the task will eventually end.
- Notice your surroundings, the feel of the object in your hands, and your emotional state.

Immersion is particularly helpful when you are engaging in a compulsive act that you usually mindlessly complete in a haze of frenzied activity.

Mindful Appreciation

Commit to noticing five things in your day that usually go unappreciated; for example, a coffee pot, a teakettle, a washing machine, the mail delivery, a bird outside your window. Notice its process, the way it looks, the sounds it makes, and its role in making your life easier.

Reflection

How did it feel to integrate meditation into your life?

Which practice did you like the best, and why?

Which practice did you like the least, and why?

How can you continue to bring more meditation practice into your life?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

Mindfulness and Your Five Senses

Objective: To learn to live in the present by tuning in to your senses.

You Should Know

Do you often find yourself agonizing over what might happen in the future, worrying about every possible thing that might go wrong, while simultaneously condemning yourself for what went wrong in the past? Being consumed by all this turmoil does not allow you to appreciate or enjoy the moment: your child's sporting event, a birthday celebration, or even a simple night out with your friends.

OCD demands that you ignore what is taking place around you by bombarding you with disturbing thoughts, urges, and images. These unwanted experiences distract you from living your life in the moment and instead encourage you to obsess about a past you can't change and an uncertain future you can't predict or control.

What if you tried to live your life according to the uplifting and freeing principles of mindfulness instead of the rigid rules of OCD? Mindfulness encourages you to notice and accept your thoughts, while at the same time not allowing you to be obsessed with them. By teaching you to focus on the present moment in a meaningful, nonjudgmental way, it takes away the power of OCD.

Does This Sound Like You?

Pam often found herself lost in a world of what-ifs, where she agonized over what might happen in the future and worried about every possible thing that might go wrong, while simultaneously condemning herself for what went wrong in the past.

What to Do

This exercise will encourage you to draw your attention away from your OCD and toward yourself, using your five senses as a guide.

Here's what you will do:

- Commit to using your sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell to channel your thoughts in a purposeful direction.
- Commit to doing this at least once a day for at least three weeks until you become accustomed to focusing your mind on the present.
- Begin by focusing on one sense for at least one to two minutes, taking the time to truly separate that sense from the next as you move from one to the other.

It does not matter what order you practice the five senses in. You can switch them around as you see fit. You can sit in a comfortable position the first few times, and as you become accustomed to performing it you can engage in it at any time or place.

At first this exercise may seem silly to you and even somewhat difficult, but as you continue to practice you will find it easier to incorporate mindfulness into your daily experience until it becomes a natural part of who you are.

Five Senses Mindfulness Exercise

Sight

- Observe what is around you, noticing shape, color, and texture.
- Look for things you would not usually take the time to notice, such as shadows, a crack in the sidewalk, the texture of your bedspread, or any other small details that usually escape you.

Sound

- Take the time to listen to what is in the background instead of what is obvious.
- Don't just notice the sound of laughter, but try to discern different types of laughs.
- Rather than simply listening for the sounds of traffic, try to distinguish horns honking from tires squealing.
- Instead of bristling at loud music, take the time to figure out what genre you are hearing.
- Listen to previously unnoticed sounds, like the hum of the refrigerator, or the clicking of the oven as it cycles on and off.

Touch

- Become aware of the differing feel of everyday items that surround you.
- Alternate touching items that are cold and warm, and notice how they make your hands feel. Touch items with various textures to notice the difference among them.
- Knit, play with play dough, or pet an animal, and notice the sensations in your fingers and hands as you feel your motions unfolding.

Taste

- Take a drink, and notice the feeling of the liquid rolling over your tongue.
- Chew on a piece of gum or candy, and take the time to notice the taste from when you first put it in your mouth until you are finished with it.

Smell

- Focus your attention on your surroundings to notice what different smells are in the air.
- Keep strong-smelling gum or candy with you to quietly smell in order to center yourself when you feel your anxiety rising. Other items such as lavender, perfume, or lotion also can provide a satisfying aroma that invokes mindfulness.

Five Senses Meditation

For a five-day period, set aside at least twenty minutes to practice this meditation, focusing on a different sense each day. For each sense, choose one suggestion from the mindfulness exercise above to focus on.

Five Senses Meditation Chart

Sense	Focus of your meditation	What you noticed	What feelings were aroused?	Notes
Day 1				
Day 2				
Day 3				
Day 4				
Day 5				

Reflection

After practicing mindfulness, what did you notice that you had not previously noticed?

Over time, how did practicing mindfulness impact your ability to focus on the present?

What difficulties did you encounter in practicing your mindfulness exercises? What adjustments did you make, if any, to make it easier for you?

How could you integrate the practice of mindfulness into combating your OCD?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

Catch and Release Your Obsessive Thoughts

Objective: To detach yourself from your obsessive thoughts by allowing them to come and go.

You Should Know

Obsessions fueled by OCD are defined by their ability to assail you until they become the defining aspect of your life. You probably find yourself absorbed by your intrusive thoughts until your life is basically consumed with anticipating them, bracing for their appearance, and fighting within yourself to control them once they predictably appear.

Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) encourages you to accept those thoughts rather than trying to control them, living in the moment instead of worrying about the past, the future, or what you cannot control. By not attaching so much importance to your thoughts, you can work toward a future defined by you, not by your inner demons.

ACT uses the technique of cognitive defusion to help you recognize when your thoughts are acting as a barrier preventing you from living in harmony with your true values. This recognition is achieved by helping you to

- look at thoughts rather than reacting to them;
- notice thoughts rather than being consumed by them;
- observe your actual thought process;
- recognize that thoughts should not dictate behaviors;
- respond to thoughts by taking reasonable actions that are sensible to you rather than following what your anxiety tells you;
- most importantly, let thoughts come and go rather than latching on to them.

Does This Sound Like You?

Carlos often felt as though his obsessive thoughts owned him. He worried about the danger that apparently only he could see and constantly thought of ways to fight against some horrific thing happening that only he could prevent.

What to Do

Use the following cognitive defusion techniques to catch and release the thoughts that consume you so that you lessen their power over you.

1. Make a conscious decision to engage in the defusion activity at a time of your choice, whether it is a one-day or three-day activity. It is important that you choose the time you

want to engage your thoughts rather than waiting for your thoughts to come to you unbidden. Doing this will help you establish the idea that you are the manager of your thoughts, and not your OCD.

2. Take your time engaging in the activity so that you can recognize every minute of what you are doing. This will help you focus your attention on the present instead of on your fruitless efforts to control your thoughts.
3. During the activity, use your five senses—sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell—to immerse yourself in the moment.

Helpful Tips Before You Begin

- Be compassionate and patient with yourself. Like many other skills, this is not something that is learned in one day.
- Encourage yourself by compassionately reframing any self-criticism. For example, you can choose to view your concern for getting your exercises right as being based on your commitment and determination to heal yourself.
- Work to make up your own exercises once you get accustomed to engaging in the activity. Planning any aspect of your treatment has the added benefit of demonstrating your ability to solve your own problems, as well as acknowledging your resilience.
- Share your practice with friends. Encourage them to join you so that they can use these activities to work through any worries or difficult times they are experiencing. Teaching someone else has the added benefit of you taking the lead in your life instead of playing the role as a passive participant.

Cognitive Defusion Exercises

1. Imagine you are fishing on a lake, stream, or river. Visualize yourself reeling in your thoughts, catching them as if they are fish, and then simply allowing them to swim away. It does not matter because they are just thoughts that have come to you unbidden. Now, visualize yourself throwing the thoughts back into the water one by one and watch them swim vigorously away until they are out of sight. See the movement of each wiggling about, trying to get your attention. Notice its color. Imagine how cold and slick it would feel in your hands. Now listen for the splash as your thoughts hit the water, swim away, and slowly sink below the surface.
2. Make up an email address. Write email messages to yourself describing in detail obsessive thoughts you have experienced. Listen to the sound your fingers make as they tap the keys. Feel each key under each finger, and notice the pressure your fingers make on the keys. Watch your fingers move on the keys as they tap out their rhythm. Say goodbye to each message containing your obsession as you hit send each time.

3. Visit a stream, or imagine that you are near one. Picture your obsessions as leaves floating down that stream. Take the time to imagine each thought floating individually, one after another. As you watch each thought float away, imagine the path it will take and where it might end up. While doing this activity, imagine how cold the water would feel on your hands, how refreshing and crisp the water would taste if you drank it.
4. Write your obsessions on slips of paper. Take a small gardening shovel, and for each obsession dig a hole in the ground (or in a planter in your home). You can plant a flower, vegetable, or plant over the top of each obsession if you like. As you are planting your obsessions, touch the dirt and notice how it feels on your hands and under your fingernails. Smell the dirt as you are burying each obsession.
5. Picture an airplane flying high in the sky trailing an advertisement on a banner. Imagine each one of your obsessions written across the banner as the plane is flying away from you. As you watch each one individually fly by, read the words as the banner passes out of your sight and disappears into the clouds. Feel the breeze on your face as you look toward the sky.
6. Imagine yourself in a garden full of flowers or vegetables. Notice how the weeds are choking the flowers, inhibiting them from reaching their full potential. Imagine that your obsessions are the weeds and that you are pulling them out one by one. You can do this activity multiple times as you imagine yourself cleaning out the garden until the weeds are completely gone. As you are weeding, take in the smell of the flowers, or the rich soil. Think of the feel of the dirt on your hands as you work in your garden.
7. One by one, imagine each of your thoughts written on the side of a car that is driving down a winding country road, or a freeway. Imagine the color of each car that will carry your thoughts away. As you watch each car taking your thought away from you, think of the journey it will go on as it becomes smaller and smaller on the horizon until you cannot see it. Smell the exhaust of the cars as they go by. Listen for the sounds of the horns honking and the tires squealing.
8. Go to a field or your own backyard, or simply imagine yourself lying on your back in a field watching your thoughts floating away, each on their own individual cloud. Watch each cloud as it slowly drifts by. Feel the breeze on your face as you watch your thoughts go away. Feel the grass on your body as you lie in it. Sniff the powerful scent of freshly cut grass as you are watching each cloud.
9. Take a basket of laundry, and as you pull out each individual item, imagine it represents one of your troublesome thoughts that you would like to wash in order to take its disturbing qualities away. As you unload the dryer, smell each item to recognize that it is now clean and trouble-free.

10. Create an obsession jar. Write each obsession out on a separate slip of paper, then put them into a jar one by one. As you are writing, watch the ink show up on the paper. Note how clear each letter appears on the page. If you like, use markers or colored pencils and write each obsession out in a color that feels as though it matches the words you have chosen. Listen carefully to hear the sound your writing implement makes on the paper. Note the smell of the marker if that is what you choose to use. After you finish putting your thoughts into the jar, close the jar for the last time and put it away.
11. Use sports to physically take away your obsessions by imagining that you are sending an obsession away each time you hit a soccer ball, golf ball, or baseball, for example. While you are doing these activities, notice the feel of the grass under your feet or how your muscles strain.
12. Make up a cognitive defusion activity based on your own unique experience. It does not have to be perfect; it just has to reflect what interests you and what values you are committed to.

Try to practice the strategies for a two-week period. Complete this chart by writing down

- a brief statement of the strategy you choose to use;
- the dates you practiced the strategy;
- how successful you were in releasing your thoughts;
- any interesting or important lessons you learned or any ideas you could use to improve your experience.

Catch and Release Thought Chart

Strategy	Dates	Success in releasing your thoughts (circle your results)	Lessons and ideas
		Very successful Moderately successful Not successful at all	
		Very successful Moderately successful Not successful at all	
		Very successful Moderately successful Not successful at all	

Strategy	Dates	Success in releasing your thoughts (circle your results)	Lessons and ideas
		Very successful Moderately successful Not successful at all	
		Very successful Moderately successful Not successful at all	
		Very successful Moderately successful Not successful at all	
		Very successful Moderately successful Not successful at all	
		Very successful Moderately successful Not successful at all	

Reflection

How did the activity become easier or more difficult as you continued?

How were you able to use your five senses to totally engross yourself in your present. What did it feel like to do so?

What did it feel like to actively work with thoughts you've usually tried to avoid or escape for an extended period of time?

What did it feel like to purposely release your thoughts and say goodbye to them?

If you were able to create some of your own exercises, what was the experience like?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

Imaginal Exposure

Objective: To lessen the control your obsessions have over you by indirectly exposing yourself to them.

You Should Know

You might be familiar with the therapeutic concept of directly confronting your fears in person. For example, if you were obsessed with dying from a spider bite, you might expose yourself to holding a spider in your hand. As an alternative, imaginal exposure therapy encourages you to indirectly confront your fears using the strength of your own mind.

This form of therapy is particularly effective in these situations:

- Your obsessions don't always have corresponding compulsions. For example, Jan is obsessed with a feeling that the world will end soon; she just doesn't know how or when. She does not engage in any accompanying compulsions.
- Your obsessive thoughts cannot be acted on due to legal or ethical reasons. For example, Stan obsesses over thoughts and images of stabbing his wife even though he has never been a violent person.
- You are so overcome by anxiety brought on by your obsessions and compulsions that you are unable to tolerate the stress associated with in-person exposures. For example, Susan is so afraid of spiders that the idea of physically holding one in her hand sends her into a state of panic. However, looking at a spider, while still upsetting, is not as horrible as actually feeling one in her hand.

Does This Sound Like You?

Edwin was horrified by the idea of visiting hospital, or schools where he might come in contact with people who are sick. His fears have expanded to include banks, train stations, and any other areas where people might look as if they were sick.

What to Do

You will begin by creating a script where you write in graphic detail about your least feared obsession and then work your way up to what you fear most. Your goal is to become accustomed to interacting with your fears to the point where the debilitating anxiety you experience is diminished, and you no longer are compelled to engage in your compulsions—a process known as habituation. You will achieve this goal by indirectly exposing yourself to your scenarios over and over again through reading or listening to your story until your anxiety dissipates, breaking the OCD cycle. Although this will likely be the scariest thing you have ever

done, remember that your fears and anxiety are only one small piece of you. You are made of what you value in life and the future you see yourself living.

You'll follow these steps:

- Choose one obsession that you are afraid of.
- Expose yourself to your fear at least once every day for one week at a time or until your anxiety level goes down to 3 or lower on a scale of 1 to 10.
- Keep a record of your experience on an Imaginal Response Worksheet.
- Track your anxiety level before and after each exposure to see how your anxiety level changes.
- Fill out an Imaginal Response Worksheet after each week.

Your script will include

- the initial triggering event;
- any physical sensations, including what you experience with your five senses;
- your thoughts;
- your actions;
- the immediate consequences of your actions, including your feelings;
- the long-term consequences you fear the most.

Make sure to write in the first person and present tense, and see it through to the end no matter how painful. Don't worry about grammar; this is for you, not for a writing class.

Finally, allow yourself to feel anxious! Experiencing your fears and anxious feelings will eventually result in your becoming used to the anxiety they generate, causing it to evaporate.

Before beginning your own script, read this sample:

(Triggering event) *It's completely quiet in my staff meeting at school.*

(Physical sensations) *I try so hard not to speak. I am sweating, and my heart is pounding, nearly coming out of my chest. I feel as though I am choking.*

(Thoughts) *My family disowns me, and I never work as a teacher again.*

(Actions) *As my principal opens her mouth to begin speaking to us, I quickly stand up, knocking over my chair, which makes a loud noise as it hits the floor. Everyone is staring at me and I am mortified, but I am unable to stop. I am screaming at her; I hear myself calling her a moron, an idiot.*

Know that boredom is the opposite of anxiety and is therefore your friend. If you eventually get bored with your script instead of getting anxious, it means that you have conquered your fears.

And don't despair! If you find yourself engaging in a compulsion or feeling some anxiety even after you thought you were over this particular fear, re-expose yourself, beginning at the experience where you started feeling the anxiety again.

Imaginal Response Worksheet

1. Write down the date and length of the exercise.
2. Rate your anxiety level on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest, before and after the exercise.
3. Add notes as needed; for example, emotions elicited, interesting observations.
4. Record whether you met your goal.

Imaginal Response Worksheet

Goal you would like to meet: _____

Date of exercise	Total time of exercise	Anxiety level before exercise (1-10)	Anxiety level after exercise (1-10)	Notes	Goal met: yes or no?

Rescript Your Intrusive Images

Objective: To lessen the hold distressing images have over you by learning to alter these images.

You Should Know

People with OCD often report that they see particularly distressing images that are so vivid that they believe that these images must accurately represent future events. They are particularly susceptible to the influence of the images they see over and over again, and these images intensify and maintain the impact of the obsessive thoughts that accompany them, even in the absence of proof that they are real.

Mental imagery, both positive and negative, is very influential. When it is paired with thoughts and ideas, it serves to increase the intensity of whatever emotions or physical responses the images arouse within you. Studies have shown that images that are visualized in the mind are much more powerful than thoughts alone. In fact, when two groups of people were asked to either think about giving a speech where everyone laughed at them or visualize giving the speech and seeing people laughing, those who saw the people laughing felt a much higher level of anxiety.

Image rescripting can help you be less easily manipulated by the negative images that relentlessly torment you. It consists of altering the disturbing images you see by changing the storyline as if it were a video you were editing. For example, if you constantly visualize yourself dying from an infection, you would instead change the script to picture yourself recovering and living a full and happy life.

This therapy has been very successful in

- helping to retrain how the brain perceives images;
- learning and internalizing more positive alternative images;
- reducing the power of distressful images.

Think about the roles images play in your OCD. Do you think they make your obsessions weaker or stronger? Most likely, the answer is that they make your obsessions stronger and serve to make you feel an even greater compulsion to engage in activities you know really aren't helpful. However, perhaps you find yourself engaging in them anyhow, in a desperate attempt to end seeing the images in your head. Do you find yourself trying to force yourself to not see the images in your head? How does that work for you? Probably not very well, and most likely the images are inversely reinforced by your efforts and appear even more frequently, fueling your cycle of OCD.

Does This Sound Like You?

John was devastated by vivid images of people he cared about dying of a dread disease. Mara's heart beat faster and faster as she visualized the imagined animals she hit and killed with her car while driving. Jose saw disturbing images flash before his eyes like neon signs over and over again.

What to Do

Begin by rating your disturbing images from 1 to 10, with 1 causing the least amount of anxiety and 10 the most. Some images may have the same rating, and that is okay.

Image Rating

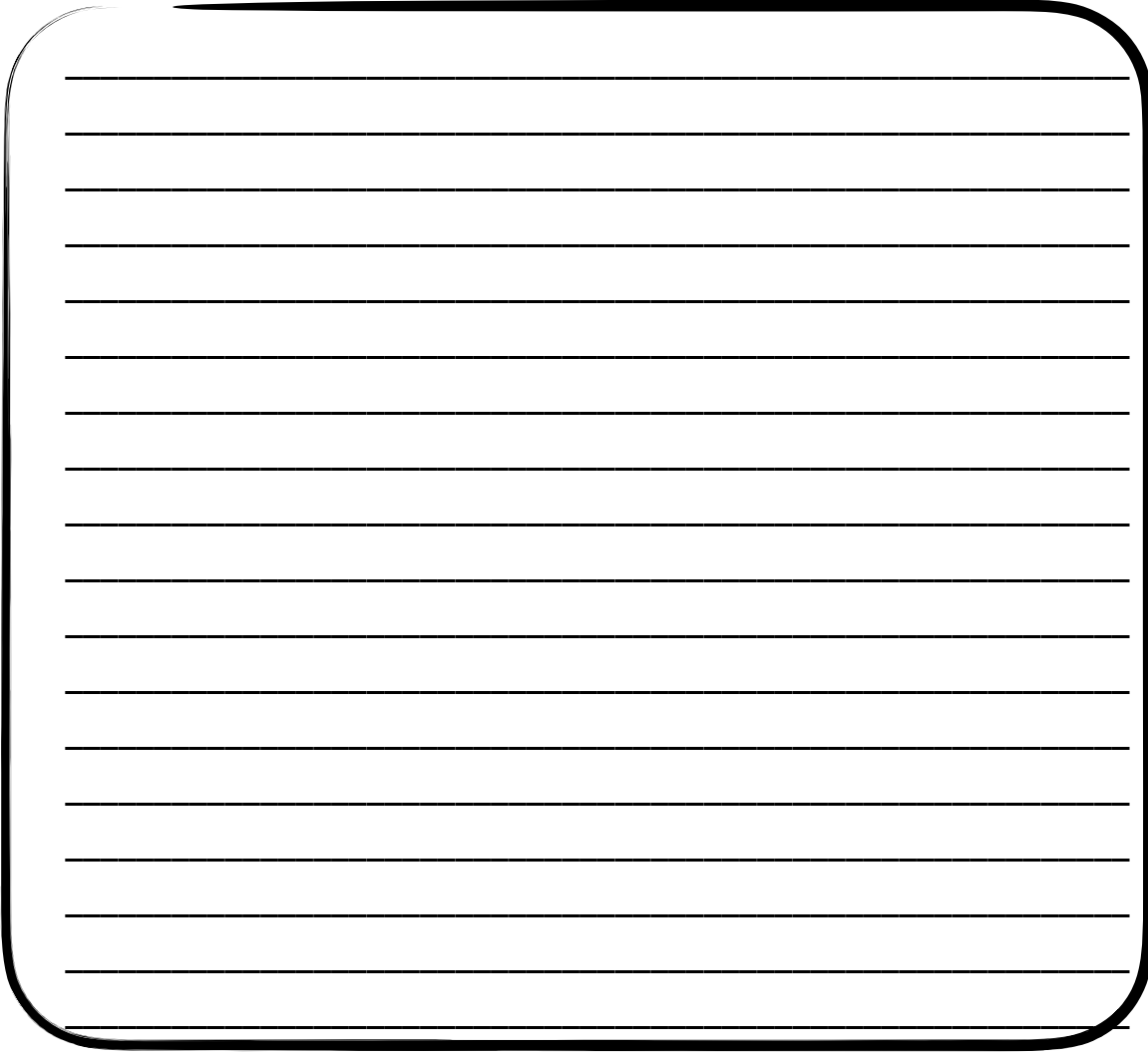
Images	Fear rating (from 1 to 10)

Next, change the image you actually see and its accompanying story to something else that you would prefer. You could

- make yourself the hero;
- use fantasy;
- change your personality (for example, if you are shy, make yourself bold; if you are usually scared, make yourself fearless).

Make sure that your rescripted story occurs *before* the most traumatic part of your usual story. Again, be sure to include your thoughts, emotions, and assumptions about yourself.

Rescripted Story



Read your rescripted story aloud or to yourself at least three times a day, perhaps at breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Every time you see the disturbing image and think of the original story, follow it up with your rescripted story.

Reflection

How do you think the images you see make your obsessions weaker or stronger?

What role do you think the emotions that accompany these images play in making your fears stronger and more entrenched?

How did it feel to make a decision to change your story from what you usually tell yourself to something more empowering?

What would it look like if you took charge of your life and story more often?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

TECHNIQUES TO TRANSFORM YOUR BEHAVIORS

Put the Brakes on Your Compulsions

Objective: To slow down your compulsive behaviors so that you can fully comprehend and counteract their impact on your life.

You Should Know

You can deliberately slow down your behavior and thoughts, taking the time to mindfully notice the sights, sounds, and smells of your surroundings as you engage in your compulsions. For example, if you are obsessed with checking the doors or tapping them a certain number of times to make sure they are locked, you would practice your mindful strategies during each door check. If you usually run frantically from door to door, breathing hard, possibly screaming, instead, you would walk slowly and purposefully through your home. Breathing slowly, you would use your senses to perhaps feel the coldness of the doorknob as you slowly turn it, to hear the crisp click of the lock as you lock it, to breathe in the warm air that surrounds you.

Does This Sound Like You?

Dan felt rushed and out of control while incessantly counting and tapping his fingers a certain number of times in order to relieve his anxiety. Heidi was so distraught as she was completing her compulsive act that she was never really sure if she completed it correctly.

What to Do

This exercise will enable you to decrease the intensity surrounding your compulsions. It will also allow you to see and understand what behaviors you are performing in their entirety, giving you more time to clearly and objectively reflect on exactly what you are doing.

To slow down your compulsions, try this exercise:

1. Create a compulsion chart to track the amount of time you spend engaging in the compulsion.
2. Choose a compulsion to focus on and write down in detail every aspect of the compulsion or ritual you engage in.
3. Plan how exactly you will slow down your participation in your compulsion. For example, will you slowly turn the water on before washing your hands? While cleaning your countertops, will you take time to compliment yourself on what a nice home you have?
4. Practice slowing down your compulsions for a ten-day period.

5. Make sure you incorporate mindfulness activities to help you immerse yourself in the sights, sounds, physical feelings, and smells of the compulsion.
6. Do this for consecutive ten-day intervals, increasing the time spent on the compulsion each time until you can chart a decrease in your anxiety level while completing the task or until you do not feel the need to do it all.

Compulsion Chart

Details of compulsive behavior:

	Usual amount of time spent on this compulsion	Level of stress associated with this compulsion (1–10)	Time spent on compulsion after deliberately slowing down	Level of stress associated with slower time (1–10)	Notes
Day 1					
Day 2					
Day 3					
Day 4					
Day 5					
Day 6					
Day 7					
Day 8					

	Usual amount of time spent on this compulsion	Level of stress associated with this compulsion (1–10)	Time spent on compulsion after deliberately slowing down	Level of stress associated with slower time (1–10)	Notes
Day 9					
Day 10					

Reflection

What did you notice that was different after you slowed the compulsion down?

In what way was slowing down your compulsive behavior more difficult than you expected?
Easier than you expected?

What would you do differently the next time you try this exercise?

What would you do the same?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

Reschedule Your Reassurance Compulsions

Objective: To reduce the hold your reassurance compulsive behaviors have on you by mindfully delaying your participation in compulsive acts.

You Should Know

You might be surprised to learn that an excessive need for reassurance is considered to be a compulsion. It is a compulsion because it is an act carried out repeatedly with the expectation of relieving anxiety prompted by obsessions.

Excessive reassurance seeking is often likened to an addictive behavior because you can never engage in this compulsive act just once. You can liken it to eating potato chips. You can never eat just one, and instead find yourself compelled by some mysterious force to eat one after another until every chip is gone.

This seemingly harmless behavior is actually very harmful for several reasons:

- It gives your obsessions power over you by validating them and by persuading you that your disturbing, irrational thoughts have meaning and substance and should therefore be paid more attention than they deserve.
- It allows and encourages you to avoid accepting your feelings of anxiety and doubt by giving you an escape that only serves to stop you from facing and working through your fears, while reinforcing the idea that the best way to alleviate your discomfort and feeling of uncertainty is to compulsively seek reassurance.
- It reinforces the idea that you are incapable of tolerating any anxiety or distress.

Does This Sound Like You?

Martin incessantly asked his family and friends for assurance that everything would be okay. When Pam had exhausted her neighbors with her questions about the likelihood of neighborhood crime, she then moved on to the internet or found herself making numerous phone calls, trying in vain to finally be reassured that her neighborhood was safe.

What to Do

The act of thinking and planning when you will begin your compulsions makes you a willing and active participant in your life instead of being passively manipulated by forces beyond your control. You will find that breaking your OCD cycle by delaying it for even a short amount of time makes it easier for you to realize how much control you have over the direction of your life. You will begin to recognize that you can tolerate more anxiety and distress than you realized.

1. Give yourself permission to engage in a compulsion and keep track of the average amount of time you spend engaging in it.
2. Make a plan to delay your compulsive behavior for at least fifteen minutes after you notice the physical signs and mental signs that your obsessive thoughts are triggering you to want to begin your compulsions.
3. Practice delaying your compulsions for two-week intervals.
4. At the end of each two-week interval, increase the time you delay your compulsions for an additional fifteen minutes.
5. Continue to repeat this exercise for as long as you need to break the hold the compulsion has over you.

This exercise has many benefits:

1. It will help you to learn to tolerate your anxiety for longer periods of time, which will result in your realizing that you are able to tolerate being uncomfortable without engaging in destructive behaviors.
2. It will increase your confidence in your ability to rely on your strengths and your commitment to yourself to work through difficult situations.
3. It will allow you to realize that there are many other ways to relieve your anxiety rather than participating in demoralizing rituals.
4. It will eventually reduce your need to engage in compulsive behavior.

Delay Your Compulsions

Write down your obsession:

Write down the compulsive behavior you choose to focus on:

Write down the goal you want to achieve (for example, *I want to reduce my need to check social media hoping to catch my fiancée cheating*):

Write down how long you will delay: _____

Ask yourself these questions before you begin your compulsions:

- Does what I am doing help or hinder my enjoyment of life?
- Does what I am doing match what I value in my life?
- Does what I am doing make me feel joyful or distressed?
- Does what I am doing propel my life's emotional, social and psychological, or economic goals or stop them in their tracks?

Delaying Compulsions Worksheet

	Beginning level of stress associated with this compulsion (Rate from 1 to 10)	Time you began this compulsive behavior	Level of anxiety associated with reduced time (Rate from 1 to 10)	Were you successfully able to delay your compulsion? (Yes or no)	Notes
Week 1					
Week 2					
Week 3					
Week 4					
Week 5					
Week 6					

Reflection

Were you able to delay your compulsions most of the time? Some of the time? Not at all?

What would it take to make the exercise more successful for you?

What strategies did you use to be able to delay your compulsions?

Which strategies were helpful; which ones were not?

Do you feel more in control, or less in control of your life after the exercise?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

Curb Your Compulsions to Diminish Your Anxiety

Objective: To diminish your anxiety level and regain your ability to have power over your OCD by purposely shortening the length of your compulsions.

You Should Know

As you know, engaging in compulsions can be incredibly time consuming, essentially stealing precious moments of time that you could be spending with your family and friends or participating in an event you enjoy. Those who have experienced compulsions frequently report that they feel compelled to repeat their compulsion often past the point of exhaustion, and yet still are unable to stop.

Do you often feel as though you are being held hostage by your compulsions after losing countless hours conducting a ritual over and over again, washing your hands incessantly, or checking each and every light in your house only to wonder “What if?” and find yourself checking all over again? Do you ever look at the clock in shock at the realization of how many hours you have wasted engaging in pointless activities?

Does This Sound Like You?

Tim was completely exhausted by the time he finished counting all the items in the house that appeared to not be supplied in equal amounts. Mia often began her compulsive acts in the morning only to realize hours later that the day was turning into night.

What to Do

Shorten the length of your participation in your compulsions in order to establish your control over how your time is spent. This exercise gives you permission to feel your anxiety, while simultaneously allowing you to recognize that you are the one giving yourself permission to indulge in your compulsion; therefore you also have the power to end it when you feel the time is right.

1. Complete a compulsion log for a week to note how often and for how long you engage in your compulsion.
2. When you find yourself engaging in a compulsive behavior, set a timer for a period that is at least *ten minutes less* than the time you usually engage in this compulsion.
3. If you would like, have a friend or family member remind you when it is time to end your compulsive acts.
4. Do this for consecutive two-week intervals, lessening the time spent on the compulsion by an additional ten minutes until the compulsion no longer has power over you.

Compulsion Log

	Obsession	Compulsive behavior	Level of stress associated with compulsion (1–10)	Average amount of time spent engaging in compulsion	Goal time (10 minutes less)	Level of stress associated with reduced time (1–10)
	Example: <i>Fiancée must be cheating</i>	<i>Checking social media</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>2 hours</i>	<i>1:50</i>	<i>7</i>
Week 1						
Week 2						
Week 3						
Week 4						
Week 5						
Week 6						

Reflection

How did facing your compulsions instead of fighting against them impact your level of stress?

How did your ability to end your compulsions earlier change as you continued this exercise?

How did it feel to incorporate choice into your compulsions instead of being compelled to finish them only when you were completely exhausted?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

Help for Your OCD Handwashing

Objective: To acknowledge, accept, and manage your hand-washing compulsions by learning to wash your hands in a way that is helpful and not hurtful to you.

You Should Know

Handwashing is widely known as one of the best ways to combat diseases and maintain overall health. Thorough handwashing has become a common practice, with many people becoming accustomed to washing their hands multiple times per day. As a result, it can be difficult for those with OCD to understand what is and is not appropriate hand-washing technique.

Hand-washing compulsions are probably the most prevalent manifestation of contamination OCD. If you engage in hand-washing compulsions, you will recognize that the obsessive fear surrounding getting or giving a disease, combined with your need for perfection and your uncertainty regarding the cleanliness of your hands, has become a vicious cycle.

Hand-washing OCD is characterized by the fear of becoming contaminated by your own actions or the actions of someone else, or the fear of spreading germs to others. It can stem from many sources; these are the most usual:

- Fear of coming close to real things, such as bacteria, germs, dirt, bodily secretions, hospitals, or people who might be sick
- Fear of objects that might seem dirty, like pencils, doorknobs, or shoelaces
- Magical thinking about colors, the names of illnesses, numbers, or other things that you fear could cause contamination
- Fear of making yourself or others sick by your carelessness

Without even being aware of it, you may feel compelled to expand your handwashing rituals to relieve your anxious feelings of being dirty—and before you know it, you are compulsively washing your hands. In fact, many people report that they are so consumed by their compulsive handwashing that they are unsure or forget how often “normal” people wash their hands.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that you should wash your hands at these times:

1. Before, during, and after preparing food
2. Before eating food
3. Before and after caring for someone who is sick
4. Before and after treating a cut or wound

5. After using the toilet
6. After changing diapers or cleaning up a child who has used the toilet
7. After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
8. After touching an animal, animal feed, or animal waste
9. After handling pet food or pet treats
10. After touching garbage

The CDC guidelines state that hands should be washed for at least twenty seconds per wash. Each handwashing should take the same amount of time as it takes to sing “Happy Birthday” twice.

Does This Sound Like You?

Robert often felt as though his hands were filthy even when they appeared clean to everyone else. Sara felt the overwhelming urge to wash her hands every time she touched an item that she imagined to be dirty or contaminated.

What to Do

Answer the following questions to assess whether you are experiencing hand-washing compulsions:

Do you experience disturbing thoughts, images, urges, or sensations that you feel can only be eliminated by cleaning and washing your body or hands, or other surfaces that you come in contact with? True False

Do you have a ritual or highly structured hand-washing routine that you are compelled to engage in, in order to feel clean? For example, do you wash each finger and nail separately? True False

Do you feel compelled to wash your hands a certain number of times in order to feel clean? True False

After washing your hands, do you feel it is highly probable that you missed a spot? True False

Do you frequently find yourself washing your hands over and over because you experience an overwhelming uncertainty that they are really clean? True False

Have your hands become red, raw, chapped, or cracked? ____ True ____ False

Do you go to the extreme to avoid places or situations that might expose you to germs?
____ True ____ False

Do you avoid shaking hands or touching objects that may expose you to germs, dirt, or disease?
____ True ____ False

Do you feel that you can control your obsessive thoughts or compulsive acts even though you realize that they are excessive? ____ True ____ False

Next, complete a hand-washing log so that you can observe objectively the amount of time you spend washing your hands. Track your handwashing for one week at a time. At the end of each week, total the amount of time you spent washing and the number of times you washed your hands. Add any notes that you feel are relevant and important.

Hand-washing Log

Week: _____

Obsessive thought triggering handwashing:

Days	Total time you spent washing your hands	Total number of times you washed your hands	Notes
Day 1			
Day 2			
Day 3			
Day 4			
Day 5			

Days	Total time you spent washing your hands	Total number of times you washed your hands	Notes
Day 6			
Day 7			

Reflection

How do you think your hand-washing behavior has impacted your life?

How does your behavior compare to the CDC guidelines?

What does this information say to you that encourages you to continue your hand-washing practices? That dissuades you from continuing?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

Do-It-Yourself Exposure and Response Prevention Guide

Objective: To learn to tolerate the anxiety and distress your fears provoke by directly exposing yourself to them.

You Should Know

Exposure and response prevention therapy (ERP) is the best-known and most successful method used to treat stubborn obsessions and their accompanying compulsions.

This therapy has two goals:

- Facing your fears by accepting and tolerating your obsessions no matter how distressful and intrusive they are
- Committing to not engaging in time-consuming and useless compulsions to escape from your fears

Exposure refers to the process of deliberately exposing yourself to your obsessions. Response prevention refers to making a mindful decision to accept what makes you uncomfortable and anxious without responding to it.

There are two ways to use ERP, and you can choose the one that is best for you:

- **Graded exposure:** This is the most popular method of exposure. It consists of constructing a fear hierarchy, or ladder, in which feared objects, activities, or situations are ranked from the least difficult exposure to the most disturbing one.
- **Flooding:** This method includes using the fear hierarchy to begin with an immediate exposure to the most difficult tasks. This is considered the best way to conduct ERP, but only if the anxiety can be tolerated.

Does This Sound Like You?

Jeffrey compulsively showered multiple times a day to combat any germs that might be present on his body. This compulsion resulted in him avoiding going out for fear of being too far away from his shower in case he needed to clean himself quickly whenever he felt the impulse.

What to Do

Step 1: Prepare for change.

This therapy is often done in a therapist's office but with proper guidance, grit, and commitment can be done independently as well. It can be overwhelming, and you may have some anxiety surrounding it, which is to be expected. However, know that it can also be the most rewarding endeavor you have ever taken on. Just remember not to become alarmed if you are experiencing some initial doubts and fears surrounding the process.

Step 2: Focus on your goals.

It is important to specifically identify what obsessions and compulsions you would like to extinguish. Having an overall goal will help you focus on what is important to you.

List the goals you would like to reach by participating in ERP therapy.

Step 3: Build your support.

Ask for the help and support of friends or family members who can coach you and offer you emotional support along your journey. Make a list of those who will support you and what they will do.

Step 4: Commit to the time.

Answer the following questions to reflect on how you will plan for the time necessary to complete your exposure plan.

How will you make time for your exposure?

How will it impact your work and family time?

Know that ERP therapy cannot be accomplished in a day. Please prepare to set aside at least three to six weeks to complete the program and allow at least two to three hours a day to work through the anxiety you will experience practicing the art of accepting but not engaging in your compulsions.

Step 5: Develop a plan.

1. List the triggers you would like to work on exposing yourself to, and rate how anxious each makes you on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest.
2. Select a trigger you would like to make your goal. You should probably choose a trigger that is no higher than a 7 and not lower than a 2 for your first goal and then work your way to a higher trigger.

3. Carry out the exposure for at least a two-week period, even though your anxiety level may seem high, while committing to not engaging in the compulsion.
4. Repeat the exposure until your anxiety rating is 2 or below.

Triggers	Anxiety rating of trigger (1–10)

Use this worksheet to track your progress in exposing yourself to the trigger you have selected as your goal.

Reflection

Person
Responsible

How did it feel to make the pledge to challenge your fears?

How did you address finding the time necessary to work on the exposure plan?

How did you address any difficulties you experienced while trying to meet your goals?

What skills do you think you gained from engaging in your exposure plan? How do you think you could transfer those skills into other areas of your life?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

Tools, Tricks, and Interventions for Your Contamination OCD

Objective: To face your fears of becoming contaminated or contaminating others by learning a variety of different methods of exposure.

You Should Know

The fears generated by contamination OCD can be overwhelming and extremely difficult to work through. This is partly because we're constantly inundated with stories that make becoming infected with some dread disease seem much more common than it actually is. Combine that with our society's fascination with hand sanitizers, body washes, and scented disinfectants and bleach (resulting in the constant push to clean and wash your hands), and you have a recipe that encourages contamination OCD to flourish.

Does This Sound Like You?

Amber constantly obsessed about her fears of transmitting germs from one part of her home to another. Julie made her entire family follow cleaning rituals, such as showering immediately when they arrived home and using both hand sanitizers and soap when washing their hands, and she insisted on disinfecting every table before her family ate.

What to Do

Fear of touching and coming in personal contact with "dirty" items is the hallmark of contamination OCD. By committing to intentionally expose yourself to these so-called dirty items, you can decrease your fears of contamination. Taking the power away from contamination OCD requires more than just working toward extinguishing your fears; it also requires changing your mind-set in terms of how you approach your fears overall.

Try the following techniques to empower yourself.

Do a full-body exposure.

1. Make a list of items you characterize as dirty or contaminated.
2. Choose one or two to touch for a one- to two-week period of time.
3. Track your anxiety level before you begin the exposure.
4. Touch a contaminated object, and slowly rub your hands all over your body.
5. Commit to resisting washing your hands afterward.
6. Track how you feel each day you touch the particular item(s).

7. Track your anxiety level after the end of each week.
8. Keep doing it until you reach the top of your fear ladder.
9. Do this activity at least three times a day for one- to two-week intervals until you decrease your fears.

Use a contamination cloth.

Take a towel, unwashed sock, washcloth, shoelace, or any other soft item that you might define as “unclean.” Rub it over a shirt you plan to wear, over your kitchen table, over doorknobs you have to touch to enter or leave your home, or over the inside of your car. If you are feeling particularly brave, rub it over places in your home where you feel “safe” from contamination.

Go green!

Do you find yourself using large amounts of harsh chemicals, such as bleach, ammonia, and other cleaning agents? This can result in a dangerous mix of chemicals that could end up causing more harm than good.

Make a list of all the cleansers you think you can’t live without. Rate each item on the list from 1 to 10; use 1 for the cleanser you can most easily live without and 10 for the cleanser you would find it hardest to live without.

Your list should include all the items you clean with: bleach, hand sanitizer, Comet, or whatever else you use.

1. Choose one or two items to do without for one week at a time.
2. Track your anxiety level before you begin eliminating these items.
3. Track how you feel each day you use the particular cleanser.
4. Track your anxiety level after the end of each week.
5. Keep doing it until you reach the top of your fear ladder.

Use a chore chart to lessen hyper responsibility.

People with contamination OCD are particularly vulnerable to hyper responsibility, believing that they are the only ones to notice hazards and that it is their obligation and moral duty to eliminate these hazards. They worry that only they are able to protect themselves and their families from some deadly disease or infection by decontaminating their homes. An important part of changing the impulse to obsessively clean your home is by making significant changes to how you approach cleaning.

Adapt this example to design a chore chart for everyone who lives in your home, and have each person choose a task that they alone are responsible for.

Chores		Week: _____						
		M	T	W	Th	F	Sa	Su
Laundry								
Make grocery list								
Grocery shop								
Go through paperwork/bills								
Mirrors								
Toilets								
Bathroom counters								
Tubs								
Showers								
Kitchen surfaces								
Dust								
Vacuum carpets								
Vacuum hardwoods								
Mop								
Deep clean kitchen/dining room								
Deep clean bathrooms								
Deep clean bedrooms								
Deep clean living and laundry rooms								
Check smoke detectors								
Yardwork								

Collaborate on cleaning chores to escape from the isolation of OCD.

The tendency to self-isolate is very common to those who suffer from OCD. Isolation makes it easier for obsessions to take over because the only voice you hear echoing in your head is that of OCD. Make room for other voices by inviting others who live in your home to collaborate on cleaning with you.

Using the chore chart you developed, pick certain chores every week that you can all do together, or that at least two people can do.

Laugh at dirt! Stop elevating your OCD.

OCD is a disorder devoid of fun and laughter. Taking your compulsions so seriously magnifies the false sense of importance that your obsessions and compulsion have taken on. What if you laughed while cleaning instead? Try the following interventions to make cleaning fun and silly.

1. Play music, perhaps a genre you usually would not listen to, or your favorite band or singer.
2. Make it a game; set a timer so you all have only ten minutes to do whatever cleaning task you have to do.
3. If you are cleaning with someone, challenge each other to a race to see who can get it done faster.
4. Listen to an audio book; focus on an interesting story instead of allowing your focus to be solely on what OCD may be telling you.

Make a mess on purpose—and then clean it up.

Embrace imperfection. For those who are so worried and concerned about the dangers of contamination, the idea of purposely making things dirty is probably the opposite of what you think you should be doing. However, it is actually therapeutic for those with OCD to practice getting dirty on purpose to face their fears and to recognize that nothing bad will actually come from being dirty.

1. Play with play dough with your children, or get some adults involved and remember your childhood.
2. Bake cookies in your kitchen.
3. Help someone do a science project in your home.

Reflection

Which strategy did you find the most helpful and why?

How did it feel to try something completely different from other strategies you might have used in the past?

How could you continue using any of the strategies in the future?

What did you learn about yourself by trying these strategies?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

Change Your Procrastinating Behaviors

Objective: To end your need to procrastinate by learning strategies.

You Should Know

Procrastination is the act of delaying or postponing a task or set of tasks. Procrastination fueled by OCD takes the tendency to this behavior to another level by encouraging the belief that there must not be any mistakes, resulting in a sense of false obligation to constantly repeat or review what has been done. Consequently, tasks that aren't done perfectly are often not done at all. When people believe it is pointless to try if they can't meet the extraordinarily high standards they set for themselves, messy rooms, cluttered desks, and uncompleted essays and projects are often the result.

Does This Sound Like You?

Alma constantly finished projects late or missed deadlines completely for fear that she would be fired from her job if she did not do her work perfectly. Sarah wanted to help her daughter make cookies for her school bake sale but failed because she kept throwing away batches that did not meet her high expectations.

What to Do

Take the following assessment to determine how much procrastination impacts your life.

I often find myself saying "I'm too tired; I'll do it tomorrow." True False

If I don't have everything I need, I can't start now. True False

I don't have enough time to do it all, so I will wait until I do. True False

I often find myself saying "It's too late to start now." True False

It won't be right or perfect so there is no point doing it. True False

My home (desk, room, car) is messy and unorganized because I can't seem to get started organizing or cleaning. True False

I often find myself performing tasks late that I had intended to do days before.
 True False

I have to reread my emails or written work over and over again until it looks just right.
 True False

I feel that if things are not done to a high state of perfection there is no point doing them.

____ True ____ False

I usually take a long time to make decisions even if I have the information I need.

____ True ____ False

I have to be inspired in order to begin any task. ____ True ____ False

I usually have to rush to complete tasks on time because I have waited so long to begin them.

____ True ____ False

I try to do many things in one day and end up not doing any of them. ____ True ____ False

When faced with a huge task, I become overwhelmed and extremely anxious.

____ True ____ False

If you answered at least six of the questions with “True,” then you most likely suffer from OCD-fueled procrastination.

Ten Tips to Help You Manage Your Procrastination

Once you have determined that you tend toward OCD-fueled procrastination, select a few of the following strategies to help you make positive changes in your life. Set a goal of practicing at least one or more strategies per week.

1. Think honestly about what you fear will happen if you don't perform to perfection whatever task you have set for yourself. Decide if your fears are probable, meaning that statistically your worst fear could really come true, or merely possible, meaning that there is a slim chance it could come true.
2. Forgive yourself for procrastinating in the past. Studies show that self-forgiveness can help you feel more positive about yourself and reduce the likelihood of procrastination in the future.
3. Rephrase your internal dialogue. The words *must*, *need to*, and *have to*, for example, imply that you have no choice in what you do. This can make you feel disempowered and might even result in self-sabotage. However, saying, “I choose to,” “I want to,” or “I would like to” implies that you own a project, and can make you feel more in control of your workload.
4. Create a detailed timeline with specific interim deadlines. Focusing on just one deadline for whatever task you need to complete is stressful and gives you too much room to procrastinate. Several smaller deadlines are less anxiety provoking and more manageable.

5. Break your work into little steps. Relying on your fears to dictate how you will complete your task often makes you focus, worry, and obsess only on the end result. Instead of allowing your OCD to dictate how you complete your task, break the task down into manageable small parts.
6. Change your environment. Make your space as positive and as life affirming as possible. Open the windows, or perhaps write positive Post-it notes that remind you what is important to you. Leave yourself encouraging voicemails.
7. Ask someone to check up on you. Peer pressure works! This is the principle behind self-help groups.
8. Tackle tasks as soon as they arise, rather than letting them build up over another day.
9. Collaborate with another person or a group; for example, bake cookies for the school bake sale with another parent, or work on a school project with a group. Collaboration often makes the work go faster and seem less intense. It also gives you a chance to see how others work and deal with anxiety.
10. Promise yourself a reward and follow through with it. If you complete a difficult task on time, reward yourself with a treat, such as a slice of cake or a coffee from your favorite coffee shop. And make sure you notice how good it feels to finish things!

Reflection

Which strategy worked the best for you, and why?

Which strategy did not work so well for you, and why?

What strategies do you think you will use to maintain and manage your tendency toward procrastination?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

Alter Your Rituals

Objective: To decrease your compulsive need for symmetry by changing your usual OCD rituals.

You Should Know

Symmetry-driven OCD describes the irrational fear or obsession that something dreadful will happen if you do not place items or perform acts in a symmetrical, ritualized way. You may feel an overwhelming sense of uneasiness or discomfort when items are not placed in an exact order or certain way. For example, you may experience an overwhelming need for items to be balanced, such as holding a coffee cup with evenly placed hands. You may become upset when words, or items such as shoes or pillows, that you believe should be symmetrical don't line up as you think they should.

Interrupting the patterns of symmetry you feel bound to follow will allow you to enhance your awareness of why, when, and how you perform your rituals in order to honestly evaluate your need for and interest in continuing them.

Does This Sound Like You?

Julian had a strong emotional response to items that are symmetrical in nature, like tiles or shapes. Tristan felt the overwhelming need to compulsively arrange or line up items so that they were perfectly spaced apart or even. Marissa became physically ill when she saw any items, such as pencils, pens or, shoes, that were not in exact lines.

What to Do

1. List the symmetry-based rituals you perform.

When you are caught up in the OCD cycle of obsessions and compulsions, you may not even realize all the different ritualized behaviors you participate in. Preparing a list requires you to acknowledge and accept your actions and to recognize the impact they have on your life.

2. Choose one ritual to focus on.

Engaging in multiple rituals encourages distraction and increases your inability to recognize the damage you inflict upon yourself due to actions you thoughtlessly engage in. Focusing on a particular ritual encourages you to notice and explore all areas of the specific behavior you engage in, helping you find a way to independently choose a different approach instead of having your behavior dictated by your fears and obsessions.

3. Explore your ritual.

After a while, you will find that your rituals blend together, with you performing them so quickly that they become second nature. Taking the time to explore your rituals in depth makes it trickier for you to ignore the control they have over you and the impact they have on your life.

4. Alter your ritual in some way.

Altering your ritual will allow you to become more mindful of the intense effort and time you put into compulsions, time that could be spent doing something you enjoy instead. Making a conscious decision to change your compulsions also helps you reassert your power over your own needs instead of passively reacting to whatever obsession you are trying to avoid or escape.

List of Your Rituals

Choose one of these rituals to explore further: _____

What triggers you to perform your ritual?

What outcome are you trying to avoid or escape by performing it?

What specific actions do you do? Must you do them in a certain order or a certain number of times?

Where are you when you are performing this ritual?

Who is with you when you are performing it, or are you alone?

Describe any direction that you feel the items must face.

What is your body doing during the ritual? Are you standing or sitting? Are you holding something? Must your hands be placed in a certain way?

Altering Your Ritual

1. Select one or more of the suggestions from the list that follows, or alter your ritual in your own unique way.
2. Implement one or more changes every day for at least a two-week period.
3. When you feel comfortable, try to let go of the ritual altogether.
4. As soon you finish extinguishing one ritual, move on to another.

Suggestions

Change the order of the objects you feel compelled to put in certain way.

Example: *Take the items on your desk and put them in different places.*

Change the order in which you perform the ritual.

Example: *If you feel you must dress in a certain order in the morning, change the order of how you get dressed.*

Change the frequency.

Example: *If you have to wash your hands six times, wash them three times instead.*

Change the amount.

Example: *If you always have to have six pencils with you, try having five or seven instead.*

Change the place where you conduct your ritual.

Example: *If you must get dressed in one room, try to get dressed in another room.*

Change the direction.

Example: *If your shoes must point forward in your closet, place them backward instead.*

Change how you physically perform your ritual.

Example: *If you usually stand, try to sit. If your hands have to be placed exactly on each side of a cup, move them so that one is higher and one is lower. If your eyes are usually closed during your mental ritual, open them.*

Get creative! Think of your own unique way to make small or large changes in your rituals.

Create your Ritual Alteration Chart to help you track your progress.

1. Choose a ritual you want to alter.
2. Describe how you want to alter the ritual.
3. Note your anxiety level when you begin to practice the alteration and your anxiety level at the end.
4. Write down the results of your practice.

Ritual Alteration Chart

Ritual to be altered	Alteration	Anxiety level at beginning of practice	Anxiety level at end of practice	Results of change

Reflection

Describe the level of difficulty or ease you experienced in altering your symmetry-based rituals.

Describe any change you experienced in your anxiety level while you were practicing altering your rituals.

How did your experience altering your rituals add to or detract from your sense of self-awareness and self-confidence?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

Embrace Your Imperfections

Objective: Learn to embrace your imperfections by recognizing the difference between healthy and unhealthy perfectionism.

You Should Know

The strong relationship between OCD and perfectionism develops from the widely accepted idea that perfection is an attribute many people naturally aspire and relate to. This overall sense of positive regard that perfectionism enjoys can make it difficult to differentiate between healthy and unhealthy perfectionism. For example, researchers have found that, when asked to define what character traits they associate with perfectionism, most people mentioned positive traits like responsibility or dedication. People found it much more difficult to consider the idea that any negative traits might be associated with perfection. Even when they did think of less positive traits—for example, standoffishness—these traits were still admired and received a positive reaction.

Healthy perfectionism is characterized by holding high standards for yourself and others, attending to details, and working diligently to reach the difficult but not unattainable goals you have set.

Fueled by OCD, unhealthy perfectionism can perpetuate and strengthen your obsessions. In fact, many people with OCD are often laser focused on control, leading them to demand of themselves what is virtually impossible: maintaining control over the disturbing thoughts they feel are unacceptable. They immediately and irrationally label those thoughts as dangerous, giving them power they do not deserve. Unhealthy perfectionism is an additional factor in the persistent and unrelenting feeling that you must achieve the impossible, do each compulsion “just right,” or else you must do it again and again, perpetuating the OCD cycle. Being able to recognize the difference between the two is central to understanding how your OCD impacts your life.

Does This Sound Like You?

Miguel set such high expectations for himself that he often found himself disappointed in his inability to meet them. Patrick was obsessed with past mistakes and had an intense fear of making new mistakes. Deepa often felt herself unable to complete any tasks no matter how big or small because she was consumed with doing them exactly right.

What to Do

To recognize the difference between unhealthy and healthy perfectionism, begin by objectively examining your behavior to see if it is fueled by your values or by your obsessive thoughts.

Read the following statements, and ask yourself whether the description that follows each sounds like you or not.

High standards are, of course, a good thing to have. Commitment, resilience, and hard work comprise the values of people who are accomplished and successful. However, people with OCD often define the standards they live by not through their values but through their fears and desperation to relieve the anxiety their fears bring them by setting standards that are impossible to meet.

Do you find the standards you set for yourself are incredibly high and often too difficult or complex to meet? ____ Yes ____ No

Is this behavior healthy or unhealthy perfectionism? ____ Healthy ____ Unhealthy

People who suffer from OCD are overinvested in doing everything well, which often results in their not being able to distinguish between a task that truly requires a great deal of attention and a task that could be accomplished in a much shorter time.

Do you feel that everything you do is equally important? ____ Yes ____ No

Is this behavior healthy or unhealthy perfectionism? ____ Healthy ____ Unhealthy

People with OCD-inspired perfectionism often feel compelled to follow rules or do things in the same ritualized ways all the time, without fail. They are often described as detail oriented at best and controlling and rigid at worst. Their behavior often seems to express the sentiment, “Do things right or don’t do them at all.”

Do you find yourself rigidly following illogical rules that you have set for yourself?
____ Yes ____ No

Is this behavior healthy or unhealthy perfectionism? ____ Healthy ____ Unhealthy

Perfectionism is often referred to as mistake phobia because those who suffer from OCD are so fearful of committing errors. They can also overestimate the consequences of making mistakes, often worrying that the smallest missteps, like leaving one light on in the house, will bring the direst results—the entire house burning down, killing the whole family.

Can you differentiate between small mistakes and large ones, or are you equally devastated by every mistake you make?
____ Yes ____ No

Is this behavior healthy or unhealthy perfectionism? ____ Healthy ____ Unhealthy

Because perfectionists believe that the tasks they complete must not have any mistakes, they feel obligated to redo these tasks repeatedly, or to constantly revisit what they've done to make sure that they've adhered to what is usually an impossible standard to meet or maintain. The problem stems from the fact that even after the task is done to perfection and the anxiety is relieved, doubts that something has been missed and that perfection may not have been achieved trigger the desire to begin the task again.

Do you feel that you have to repeat an action over and over again until it is "just right"?

Yes No

Is this behavior healthy or unhealthy perfectionism? Healthy Unhealthy

You might be surprised to learn that procrastination and perfectionism are directly related to each other. Procrastination results when a task is avoided because it is too overwhelming to handle mentally and physically. Messy rooms, cluttered desks, and uncompleted essays and projects are often the result of the OCD-triggered beliefs of those who think it is pointless to try if they cannot meet the extraordinarily high standards that they set for themselves or that they mistakenly think other people set for them.

Do you end up not completing certain tasks or missing deadlines due to your fear that your task has not been done to perfection? Yes No

Is this behavior healthy or unhealthy perfectionism? Healthy Unhealthy

Embrace Imperfection to Live a Life Free from OCD

Practice being imperfect to explore how it feels to be influenced by your values rather than by your anxiety. Unhealthy perfectionism is triggered by an adherence to anxiety, characterized by an extreme and troubling attention to details, an excess of concern about others' opinions, unrelenting self-criticism, and an utter fear of making mistakes.

Embracing imperfection in your life will allow you to expand your definition of perfectionism to include compassion for yourself, and thus to focus on the joy in the activity itself rather than defining yourself solely by the results.

1. Make a list of imperfections that you can practice exposing yourself to. Use some examples from the following list or make up your own.
 - Show up for an appointment late.
 - Leave unfolded some items of clothing that you usually feel you must fold perfectly.
 - Send an email without having checked it for spelling and grammar.
 - Wear an item of clothing with a small stain on it or a small tear.
 - Serve a store-bought cake (or other food) instead of making it from scratch.

- Share an idea without planning it out first.
 - Lower an impossible standard you have set for yourself; for example, instead of doing your usual thirty pushups, do only ten.
 - Leave a mess out in the house where someone can see it: a dish unwashed, couch pillows thrown around, a pair of shoes somewhere that your standards say they should not be.
2. Make a fear hierarchy from the list, from the fear that causes the least anxiety to the one that causes the most.
 3. Expose yourself to the imperfections you chose, starting at the lowest level of anxiety for at least a two-week period each.

Create Your Own Imperfection Practice Chart

1. Describe a behavior, an action, or an area of your life that you identify as being shaped by unhealthy perfectionism.
2. Select a strategy that challenges your expectations for perfection.
3. On a scale of 1 to 10, note your anxiety level as you begin practicing the strategy.
4. Note your anxiety level after you have practiced the strategy.
5. Reflect on the results of the strategy.

Imperfection Practice Chart

Date of practice	Imperfection	Strategy	Anxiety level at beginning (1–10)	Anxiety level afterward (1–10)	Results

Date of practice	Imperfection	Strategy	Anxiety level at beginning (1–10)	Anxiety level afterward (1–10)	Results

Reflection

How did your experience in embracing imperfection impact your confidence in your ability to enact change in your life?

How did practicing the imperfections impact your ability to purposely make mistakes?

What was the most difficult imperfection for you to tolerate, and why?

What was the easiest imperfection for you to tolerate, and why?

How could you apply the lessons you learned from this activity to other areas of your life where you seek perfection?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

LIVING YOUR BEST LIFE

Forgive Yourself for Your OCD

Objective: To relinquish the hold OCD has on your life by learning to forgive yourself.

You Should Know

Most people find that forgiving themselves is much harder than forgiving others. This difficulty is attached to the idea that it is always easier to feel compassion for others, to want to ease their suffering, than it is to find compassion for yourself. In addition, finding forgiveness for yourself is often intertwined with ingrained negative beliefs about yourself, such as, “I am always making mistakes,” or “I must be a terrible person to neglect my family and focus on my OCD instead,” that make it even more difficult to put your past behind you.

No matter how difficult it is to do so, forgiving yourself is paramount to ensuring your psychological and emotional health. You may not realize it but constantly worrying about how much you have lost to OCD holds you back from living your life in much the same way that living with OCD does. In contrast, forgiving yourself and letting your worries about OCD go has been found to be linked to relieving several mental health issues that coexist and strengthen OCD, such as depression and anxiety, as well helping to increase an overall sense of hopefulness and well-being.

Forgiveness means

- deciding to overcome the pain that you feel you are inflicted with;
- letting go of the negative feelings associated with your issues: anger, resentment, fear, or shame, among other feelings;
- having compassion for yourself.

Does This Sound Like You?

Malik felt as though it was his fault that he was so consumed by OCD that he let down the very people he thought he was protecting. Even though he knew intellectually he was not to blame for his OCD, he beat himself up over time he had wasted and could not seem to forgive himself.

What to Do

Taking the time to explore the positive and negative aspects of what forgiveness means in your life will enable you to reflect on what you would like your life to look like and what changes you could make in order to reach the outcome you would like.

To explore the pros and cons of forgiving yourself, start by thinking about what might change for

better or worse if you did not forgive yourself.

- Painful emotions
- New relationships
- Better relationships
- Financial gain
- Time spent or wasted
- Hopefulness
- Self-confidence

Would your life be enhanced? Would you feel more or less free? List the pros and cons of forgiving yourself here.

Pros and Cons Worksheet

Pros	Cons

The Stages of Self-Forgiveness

Charting your journey through the process of forgiving yourself can allow you to both see clearly where your life is and how it could be. Explore what stage of forgiveness you are experiencing right now so that you can make a plan to commit to fully forgiving yourself and letting hope guide your life instead of regrets.

Note that self-forgiveness is an evolving process. You might skip steps or even find yourself finishing a step and wanting to go over it again. The following exercises can help you develop a plan to work through each stage at your own pace.

Phase 1. The Uncovering Phase

Do you accept and acknowledge how OCD has impacted your friendships, your work, and your life in general? Can you objectively and honestly, no matter how painful, go through each event in your life that was impacted by OCD?

Make a list of your ten worst OCD-influenced moments.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Phase 2. The Decision Phase

Answer the following questions to determine if you are ready to forgive yourself:

- Has feeling angry and resentful toward yourself been helpful or unhelpful to you?
- Can you honestly say that blaming yourself has made you feel better about yourself? Worse?
- Would forgiving yourself help or hinder you in reaching a more positive outcome?
- Have you chosen to freely commit to forgiving yourself and changing your life?

Phase 3. The Work Phase

The real work begins here. It is at this point that you make the commitment to stop berating yourself for the choices you have made and begin to have compassion for yourself. In doing so,

you begin to let go of your resentment and anger toward yourself and instead embrace optimism.

Try this ten-minute forgiveness meditation to help you practice forgiving yourself.

1. Make yourself comfortable. You can choose to lie down or sit in a chair. You can be outside or inside, whatever place gives you the most peace.
2. Breathe in and out slowly. Make sure to draw all your attention to your breath instead of whatever is bothering you.
3. Picture one of the moments you wrote down in Phase 1, an OCD-related event that you previously have negatively judged yourself for. Recall the emotions you felt toward yourself; for example, anger, resentment, shame. Note the physical feelings that accompanied those emotions; for example, sweating, stomachaches, dry mouth.
4. Say these four statements either silently to yourself or out loud.
 - I forgive myself for being unaware of the impact of OCD on my life.
 - I forgive myself for not taking action sooner to address my disorder.
 - I forgive myself for causing pain and distress for myself and for those I care about.
 - I forgive myself and choose to move on to my better life.

Phase 4. The Flourishing

In this stage, you will start to embrace the personal freedom that comes from releasing your negative depiction of yourself and instead seeing yourself for the resilient person that you are. You will begin to feel a sense of freedom instead of heaviness in your body. You might feel a sense of anticipation instead of apprehension toward what might happen in your future. You might also experience feelings of hopefulness instead of hopelessness.

Reflection

What would it feel like to forgive yourself instead of criticizing yourself for having OCD? Would you feel lighter or heavier?

What would it feel like to look forward to a bright future instead of obsessing over your past?

What role will forgiveness play in knowing when you are ready to move past your OCD?

How did you define forgiveness before the exercise? How do you define it now?

What role, if any, did forgiveness play in your life before you did the exercise? What role do you think it will play in your life now?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

Helper or Enabler?

Objective: To learn the difference between helping and enabling someone who is suffering from OCD.

You Should Know

Enabling refers to giving help to someone that perpetuates rather than solves their problem: for example, a spouse calling in sick for an alcoholic who is too drunk to go to work or a parent blaming a teacher for being inept when their child fails a test they did not bother to study for. Their actions may seem helpful, but by constantly stepping in to solve the problem or to make the person feel better, they are unconsciously taking away any motivation for people to try to solve their own problems.

The desire to help is normal and representative of the feeling and actions of many family members of those who have OCD. OCD is so insidious that, just as it slowly takes over the person who suffers from it, it also slowly seeps into the lives of the people who are closest to that person. Before you know it, you are so busy “helping” that you don’t realize that in reality you are hurting the one you care about by helping their obsessions become more firmly entrenched.

Instead, focus on empowering the person by showing them that

- you trust them to help themselves;
- you have confidence in their abilities;
- you have hope for their future.

Does This Sound Like You?

Nancy often found herself wondering what harm it could do to ease her daughter’s anxiety for a short time by repeatedly helping her arrange her shoes, clothes, and other items in perfectly symmetrical rows. George wanted to alleviate his mother’s fears of possibly hitting people with her car by driving her when she asked him to.

What to Do

Answer the following questions to understand and recognize the impact your behavior is having on someone’s ability to recover and take their life back from OCD:

Do you often find yourself helping to perform rituals, like putting items in a certain order or checking door locks? Yes No

Do you make excuses for the person’s behavior? Yes No

Do you reassure the person when they ask repeatedly for reassurances? ____ Yes ____ No

Do you make excuses for the person's behavior because you think their OCD is making them do things they would not normally do? ____ Yes ____ No

Do you help them avoid places, objects, and stimuli that are triggering to them?
____ Yes ____ No

Do you pretend that everything is okay when you know it is not? ____ Yes ____ No

Do you lie or cover for the person at work, at school, or with friends to protect the person or prevent others from thinking negatively about the person? ____ Yes ____ No

Do you want the person to be able to avoid being embarrassed by or ashamed of their behavior? ____ Yes ____ No

Do you help the person clean or decontaminate areas or objects? ____ Yes ____ No

Do you provide transportation when their fears prevent them from driving?
____ Yes ____ No

Do you avoid addressing their behavior to keep peace in the family? ____ Yes ____ No

Do you minimize the situation? ____ Yes ____ No

Do you think the problem will get better later? ____ Yes ____ No

Do you try to protect your loved one from pain? ____ Yes ____ No

Reflection

In what ways, if any, were you surprised by your answers?

How did answering the questions help you reevaluate how you might support someone with OCD?

After answering these questions, how would you define enabling as opposed to helping?

How do you think you might help someone with OCD in the future?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

Create a Family Contract

Objective: To help those you care about manage their OCD symptoms by addressing the family's role.

You Should Know

The hardest part for those who care for someone suffering from OCD is to watch them struggling to manage their OCD. When they ask you for help to relieve their uncertainty by assisting them with completing a compulsive act, you know it is not really helpful to pretend that their obsessions are based in reality, in order to avoid upsetting them. When, against your better judgment, you reassure them that everything will be all right if only they check the doors twenty times or wash their hands for an hour, you have to ask yourself, are you really being helpful?

Many families face this dilemma when trying to support someone with OCD. Creating a family contract that addresses your role in your loved one's struggles, the person's specific problems and behaviors, and the best strategies for providing useful assistance can help a family be proactive while still not impeding the person's sense of self-reliance and self-worth.

Does This Sound Like You?

Guy struggled with how to support his son as he helped him learn how to manage his OCD symptoms. He would do anything to support him, but he also worried that his attempts to help him might be more harmful than helpful.

What to Do

Create your family contract with the following steps:

Clearly state the issue.

It is very important that the language of the plan is clear so that everyone knows exactly what the issue is and how it impacts the family.

Example: Joe worries that criminals are going to break into the house and harm his family. He constantly asks his family for reassurance that he has closed and locked all the windows and doors because he is not sure they remembered to do it. His constant in-person questioning, emails, texts, and phone calls have made family members late for school and work, interrupted their daily activities and social lives, and embarrassed them in front of others.

Clearly state the approach.

The family can agree to either of these approaches:

- *Flooding*, where the family agrees to totally stop any efforts to reassure the family member—with no exceptions! This approach works best when the compulsions are not ingrained and occur only on a limited basis, or when the person with the compulsions decides that they would like to stop engaging in their compulsions all at once.
- *A gradual approach*, where the family agrees to initially stop participating in only some of the compulsions, with the goal of gradually expanding their commitment to stop supporting the compulsions altogether.

Example: *Joe's family kept a log counting the number of times he asked them in the morning about closing and locking the doors. They agreed to cut down the times they reassured him by half and to gradually decrease it until they stopped reassuring him altogether. They also kept a separate log for the times he called, emailed, or texted them, and made a plan to also gradually cut down on responding to him until they felt they could stop in total.*

Identify what specific behaviors the person with OCD is trying to change.

It will be helpful for the entire family to understand what fears, obsessions, and compulsions the identified family member experiences, so that the family can agree on what behaviors to focus on and how to provide the proper support.

Identify what behaviors the family has agreed they will *not* engage in.

Make a written list of behaviors that the family has committed to *not* engaging in. The family should work together as a team to decide and list exactly what behaviors they will not support and how they will achieve this goal.

Create a commitment statement that the entire family writes together.

All family members from the youngest to the oldest need to commit to following the plan they have agreed upon. It is also important that the entire family work together to develop a plan that works for everyone and that addresses every detail so that no part of the problem is neglected. This plan should be in writing and posted where the entire family can view it.

Make sure you

- are consistent;
- start out with small goals;
- don't give up; (If you concede and reassure, immediately agree to try to not engage the next time you are asked.)
- celebrate the successes!

Family Contract

The issue

The approach we'll take

Specific behaviors to be addressed

Behaviors we will not engage in

Our family commitment statement

Reflection

Before making the family contract, how difficult was it to not provide help to the person you care for?

How did the contract make it easier to provide care that was helpful rather than enabling?

How do you think having the contract strengthened the person with OCD?

Based on your experience working on this activity, what advice would you give to other families who are trying to support someone with OCD?

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful overall.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me learn something new.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

It helped me reach my goals.

___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4

TOP TIPS FOR RELAPSE PREVENTION

So you have successfully taken back your life from your OCD, but now what? At times of stress, it's likely you will find yourself thinking some of the same thoughts that in the past might have caused you to spiral out of control. You might even find yourself responding to triggers that in the past caused you to engage in unhelpful behaviors.

How do you stop yourself from falling back under OCD's spell? Please know that this is a concern of the majority of people who have OCD and that there are strategies that can help you maintain your new healthy OCD-free lifestyle.

Understanding the role that relapse prevention plays in your life is the first step you can take toward being an active participant in your continued success. Being prepared for setbacks is one of the most important aspects of relapse prevention.

A *relapse*, for example, is defined as a return to the same level of symptoms that existed before treatment began. Although relapsing is what people tend to fear the most, what people most often experience is actually a *lapse*. A lapse means that you might experience a brief or partial recurrence of some symptoms or behaviors. Lapsing is normal and to be expected. For example, you may still have some intrusive thoughts from time to time, although they will most likely lessen. It is, of course, important to remember that the intrusive thoughts themselves, while upsetting, are not important—your reaction to them is.

Relapse prevention is designed to help you to continue to use the strategies and interventions you learned throughout your treatment that assisted you in achieving your goals. Reviewing and consistently using these strategies will help you

- recognize and remember the unique nature of OCD;
- recognize early warning signs;
- be aware of potential risks;
- be aware of avoidance behaviors you engaged in the past, which kept you from facing your fears and instead paradoxically strengthened them;
- remember what strategies worked well for you and which ones did not.

Use the following relapse prevention strategies to maintain your OCD-free life.

Remember that it is okay to feel uncertain.

Keep in mind that you already deal with uncertainty in your life every day; you just don't think about it. When you start a new project at work or drive to a new destination, you don't know

the outcome and yet you are able to work through it. Try to think of what makes those situations tolerable in comparison to other situations.

Go back and review the times when uncertainty has been a positive part of your life; for example, surprise gifts, an unexpected hug from a loved one, or perhaps when your child or a young relative took their first step or spoke their first word.

Purposely add uncertainty to your life. Use the strategies you used in the past to accomplish this or think of some new ones. Here are some examples:

- Drive a new way to work.
- Wear your hair in a different way.
- Purposely throw a pillow onto the floor and leave it there for the day.

Remember your values.

It is healthier to live your life according to your values instead of an arbitrary standard that is set by your OCD and impossible to attain.

- Make a list of what you value in your life.
- Choose one value from that list and try to make sure you incorporate it into your life for a two-week period.
- Work your way through each value.
- Carry a list of values with you so that you can remind yourself of what is really important to you when you are feeling anxious.

Embrace imperfection.

Unhealthy perfectionism leads to anxiety, unrelenting self-criticism, and a fear of making mistakes that is unhealthy and triggers your obsession and compulsions. Implementing imperfection in your life will allow you to focus on the joy in the activity itself rather than solely defining yourself by the imagined negative results.

Use strategies likely to intentionally add imperfection to your life:

- Sleep in late one or two days when you know you have time, like on the weekends.
- Make a mess somewhere in your home, and don't clean it up for at least an hour.
- Around the house, wear socks that don't match.
- Cook something without following a recipe.
- Let someone else pick out a new restaurant to try.

Think of additional ideas on your own, or let someone else think of some you can try and then commit to following their suggestions.

Remember to Incorporate mindfulness into your everyday life.

Mindfulness encourages you to notice and accept your thoughts while at the same time not allowing you to be obsessed with them. By teaching you to focus on the present moment in a meaningful and nonjudgmental way, mindfulness takes away the power of OCD. Making mindfulness an everyday part of your life, like drinking water or brushing your teeth, can help you remain consistently centered and focused on what is taking place right in front in you, instead of allowing you to become lost in what happened in the past or might happen in the future.

- Make a list of the meditations you enjoyed doing the most.
- Choose one of these meditations and practice it every day for a two-week period.

Remember to engage in self-care.

Self-care is vital for building resilience that helps you cope with those stressors in life that you can't eliminate. When you're too tired, eating poorly, or generally run down, you will likely be more reactive to the stress in your life. You may even create more problems for yourself by reacting poorly rather than responding from a place of calm strength. Be sure that you

- get enough sleep;
- maintain proper nutrition;
- exercise regularly;
- maintain social support;
- pamper yourself;
- process your emotions.

Finally, take the time to appreciate the goals you set for yourself and how you managed to achieve those goals through your resilience and your determination to take your life back. You have probably experienced some setbacks, and you may even experience a few more. On your journey, embrace the good and the bad without recrimination but with kindness and respect for yourself and what you have accomplished. Remember to celebrate how far you have come and to be hopeful that you'll create the future you want.

Overcoming Your OCD

Obsessive-compulsive disorder impacts people of all ages and walks of life. It is defined by obsessive, uncontrollable, recurring thoughts, images, and impulses that are intrusive and unwanted, creating an unrelenting desire to escape from the subsequent anxiety that is evoked. These overwhelming feelings often compel people to engage in compulsive behavior that their OCD-driven thoughts trick them into believing will alleviate their anxiety—behavior that, paradoxically, only serves to strengthen it.

This book will help you explore and assess the role OCD plays in your world so that you can take back your thoughts and live the life you desire. You will gather your personal strengths, values, and passions to explore the skills you possess—skills that will further strengthen and heal you. You will stop fearing your own mind and emotions and begin to embrace what makes you unique, worthwhile, and interesting so that you can bring serenity instead of chaos into your life. You will discover the healing power of your own mind and how you can train your brain to focus on the sights, sounds, and feelings that are all around you so that your values and goals, instead of your OCD, will shape your thoughts and alter your behavior in a way that is consistent with your values.

Activities in the workbook include:

- Alter Your Rituals
- Assess the Role OCD Plays in Your Life
- Catch and Release Your Obsessive Thoughts
- Commit to Change
- Create a Library of Your Values
- Do-It-Yourself Exposure and Response Prevention Guide
- Embrace Your Imperfections
- Imaginal Exposure
- Lighten Your Load Through Laughter
- Mindfulness and Your Five Senses
- Moderate Your Fight-or-Flight Response
- Name Your OCD
- Own Your Thoughts
- Rescript Your Intrusive Images
- Tools, Tricks, and Interventions for Your Contamination OCD
- Transform Emotional Chaos into Serenity
- Understand What Drives Your OCD Cycle
- Welcome Mindfulness into Your Life
- What Would You Tell Your Friend?
- Write Your OCD Story

About the Author:

Margaret Auguste has a master's degree in Marriage and Family Therapy from Pepperdine University. Her eclectic style of therapy includes mindfulness, cognitive, narrative and solution-focused therapy designed to emphasize the healing nature of positivity and one's own personal strengths and values. Her methodology has been shaped by her extensive work facilitating individual, home-based, and group therapy with adults, children, adolescents, and families in a variety of therapeutic environments that include psychiatric facilities, educational settings, adolescent group homes, and counseling centers throughout the country. She is the author of VOYA'S Guide to Intellectual Freedom for Teens, as well as several essays and short stories that address psychological well-being, culture, gender, education, literature, and motherhood.

About the Series:

Between Sessions Resources publishes a variety of worksheets and other tools designed to be used as therapeutic homework. *Overcoming Your OCD* is one of a series of workbooks designed to help people practice the psychological skills they learn in therapy.