

OCD SESSION 7

COURSE WORKBOOK





WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT INTRUSIVE THOUGHTS?

You WILL experience intrusive thoughts, but this is NORMAL. Remind yourself that it's okay to have these thoughts and try to let them drift through your mind. Remind yourself that having these thoughts does not mean that you're mad, bad or dangerous to anyone or yourself. Try not to block out or neutralise the thoughts in any way, as this is more likely to make them come back. Continue with your exposure hierarchy – you'll soon start to get used to the thoughts and realise they aren't so frightening.

WHAT DO I NORMALLY DO ABOUT MY THOUGHTS? AND DOES IT WORK?

As we talked about last week, people with obsessional thinking try and control the impact of their thoughts through the use of their compulsions or by trying to stop thinking about them. Is this helpful?

Let's think of an example.....

Jim is scared of tigers. But he has a "magic pen" that has protected him from tigers his whole life. In fact, he has never been attacked by tigers. SO... whenever he gets worried about tigers, he checks his magic pen and is reassured. But he is still worried about getting attacked by tigers. One summer, Jim went to India (where there are lots of tigers), and because he had his magic pen, he was able to control his worry. Unfortunately, he got eaten by a tiger.

Let's think about the mistakes that Jim made-

- Did his pen work?
- Did his worries about tigers go away?
- Did his worry stop him getting eaten by a tiger?
- What would have happened to his worry if he had lost his magic pen?

This silly example highlights the importance of our beliefs in what works. We think that reacting and engaging with the thoughts is way to make them go way. But what actually happens is that if you pay the thoughts too much attention, they become **REINFORCED**. Therefore, the worries and obsessions are more likely to appear if you listen and react to them or try to stop them. This is known as thought suppression and almost every study that examines whether it works, shows that it actually has the opposite effect; it makes the thoughts come back more often.

HINTS AND TIPS FOR CHALLENGING INTERPRETATIONS

Since intrusive thoughts are normal, we focus on changing the interpretation of the thought. It's a skill like any other and it takes time to learn, so don't be worried if it doesn't come naturally at first or doesn't seem to be helpful yet. You wouldn't expect to be able to run a marathon after only one training session, and challenging your interpretations is the same. Below are some helpful tips, hints and questions to ask yourself when you're trying to challenge your interpretation of an intrusive thought.



- Am I forgetting it's normal to have these thoughts?
- Am I assigning too much importance to a thought?
- Do I think that having this thought makes it more likely to happen?
- Do I think that having the thought is as bad as doing it?
- Am I forgetting that I need intent (to want to do it)?
- Do I believe the thought means that I'm dangerous?
- Am I telling myself that I shouldn't be having these thoughts?
- Am I getting anxious about something I can't be 100% certain over?
- Am I considering the evidence for and against this interpretation?
- Would my interpretation stand up in court based on the evidence?
- What would one of my friends tell me about my interpretation?
- What would I tell a friend who had the same interpretation?
- What are the effects of this interpretation?
- What are the benefits of this interpretation?
- What are the costs of this interpretation?
- Does this interpretation contribute to my problems with OCD?
- Am I taking more than my fair share of responsibility?

DESIGNING BEHAVIOURAL EXPERIMENTS

Be your own scientist! Behavioural experiments are like mini exposure exercises, however, they're specifically designed to test out an interpretation. For example:

Thought: Image of stabbing child

Interpretation: I'm a bad mum. I'm a danger to my children. Having this thought is as bad as doing it.

Experiment: Ask some friends who I think are good mums if they ever have intrusive thoughts like this, and if they worry about it. Have a knife nearby when my children are with me in the kitchen and see what happens.

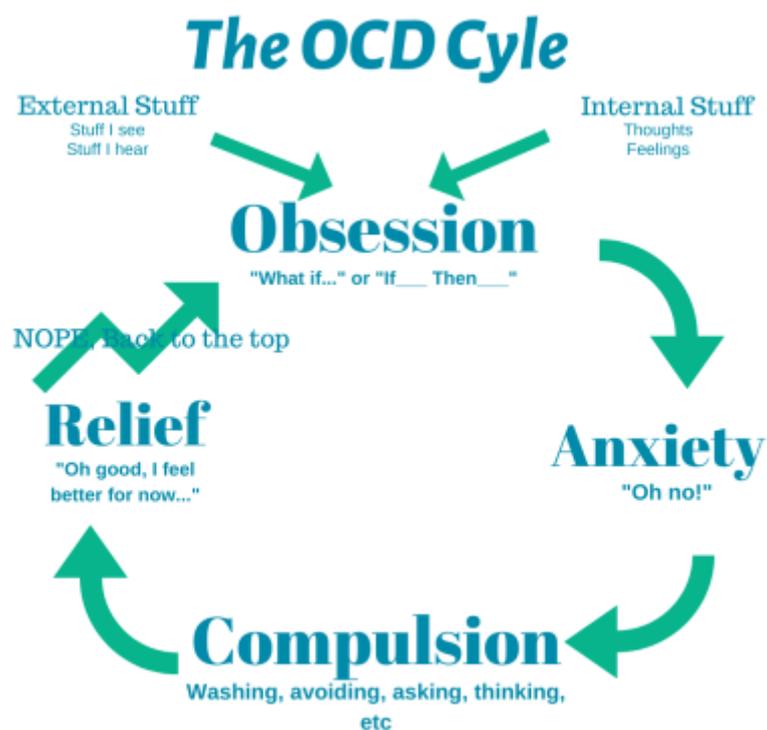
The aim of the experiment here is to challenge the interpretation. Asking friends who are good mums if they have intrusive thoughts like this would tell us whether this is a normal experience. If good mums can have the same thoughts, just having the thought can't make you a bad mum, can it? Having the knife around when the kids are nearby is an excellent way to prove to yourself that you aren't a danger. Remember unless you WANT to do it, it's not going to happen.



PUTTING CHALLENGES INTO EVERYDAY PRACTICE

Changing your interpretations won't happen overnight. To begin with it will be difficult, and you might find that it makes very little difference. However, gradually, over time you will start to notice that the challenges to your interpretations start coming easier and easier.

Use form 2 below to come up with alternate interpretations and behavioural experiments to test these out. Use the hints and tips on the earlier pages to help you come up with alternate interpretations to your intrusive thoughts.



Form 2: Challenging interpretations

Trigger	Intrusive thought or obsession	Interpretation: what the intrusive thought meant to me (how I felt)	Response: what I wanted to do	Challenge to interpretation and/or behavioural experiment
Seeing piece of broken glass on pavement	Image of child tripping and falling on glass, getting it stuck in her leg	I know what might happen in the future. If I don't do something it will be my fault (scared)	Wanted to pick up glass and throw it away. Look for glass on the way home	This is just a picture in my mind. I'm not responsible for keeping the world safe. Just let the image happen.
Touching my shoes as I took them off as I came in the front door	I might have trodden in dog excrement as I walked from the car without noticing and passed my germs on to children	The thought of treading in dog excrement is the same as it happening. It's irresponsible to take risks with my children's health. They could go blind. (guilty)	Wanted to place my shoes on some newspaper, wash my hands with anti-bac soap three times and get changed and wash my hands again.	It's just a thought that I'm contaminated. Not taking risks is making me ill. I'll use the exposure and tolerate any doubts to make life better for myself and my kids
The children playing in the back garden	Image of holding out a knife as the children run in to the kitchen.	Having a thought of harming my children is as bad as doing it. I'm a risk to my children and a bad mother. I must care for the children it's my responsibility (guilty & anxious)	I wanted to count to five in a set of five to protect them. I wanted to remove all the sharp knives from the house.	This is just a thought. A thought doesn't mean I'm going to do it. Avoid counting and don't remove any knives from house. Use knife to start cutting vegetables for dinner.



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FORM 3: RESPONSIBILITY PIE CHART

Think about your own intrusive thoughts. Pick a fear catastrophe (e.g. running over someone in the car, the children getting ill etc.) and list all the people and aspects of the situation that would be involved excluding yourself. Put yourself last on the list.

Then assign proportions of the responsibility for the event that reflect relative responsibility- again put your own % in last.

Name/aspect of situation	% responsibility



RESPONSIBILITY PIE

We often blame ourselves some feared future event that might happen. However, we usually give ourselves more than our fair share of that blame and responsibility.

This “Responsibility Pie” is one way of challenging that distorted thinking.

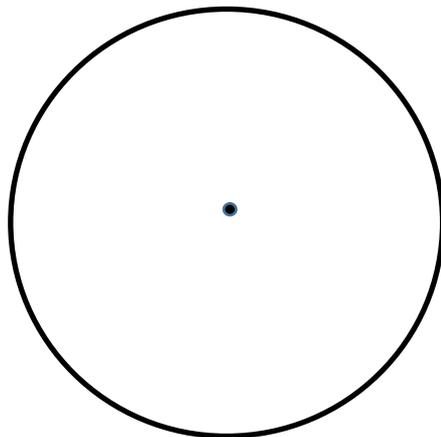
Write down how responsible you would feel if the feared situation happened, using a percentage scale with 0% being not at all responsible, and 100% being totally responsible.

%

Now think about and write down all the other factors that may have contributed to this event and share some responsibility.

Now give a percentage for each factor, according to how responsible that factor would be. In the example the person has marked 10% for roads, poor signage and mechanics as being partially responsible.

Example: *I crashed the car*



You can note these down or use this space to write down factors that contributed:

The part you are left with (if any) is how responsible you REALLY might be! The Responsibility Pie can also be used when we blame ourselves totally for a bad event that DID happen.

Has this changed your ideas regarding your level of responsibility for this event or situation?