

OCD SESSION 6 COURSE WORKBOOK





This week we talked about Values, Beliefs, intrusive thoughts and interpretations. We also talked about useful ways to challenge and eventually change our unhelpful interpretations. This booklet will re-cap some of what we discussed and includes the home task for this week.

VALUES AND BELIEFS

Values are a set of beliefs of a person or social group that carry an emotional investment. Values can be a collection of guiding principles that we deem to be correct and desirable in life, especially regarding our own conduct. For example: I should be a good mother. I should be a good Christian. I should be good. I should be honest etc. We acquire values throughout our life from our families, peers and society; therefore everyone's values are a little bit different.

Beliefs are facts about our self and the world that we hold to be true. These can be positive, but often in OCD they fall into two main categories.

Danger: an overinflated sense of danger. Believe there to be an increased risk of bad things happening. "The world is a dangerous place"

Responsibility: an overinflated sense of responsibility. It's all down to me. The world is dangerous and "I must protect myself and others".

INTRUSIVE THOUGHTS

Intrusive thoughts are often related to our values. In fact, they are usually in direct opposition to our value system. We call these 'ego-dystonic' thoughts. In part it's because the human brain is like a simulator. It's evolved to allow you to imagine all kinds of possibilities, including those that go against your value system.

Everyone has intrusive thoughts, they are entirely normal! Sometimes these thoughts are about our own actions. For example: thoughts about jumping out of the window, stabbing a passer by, swerving the car into the wall while driving etc. Sometimes the thoughts can be about an unwanted outside event. For example: a loved one developing a serious illness, developing a serious illness yourself or a natural disaster.





INTERPRETATIONS

Interpretations are the meanings that we apply to our intrusive thoughts. Since we all have intrusive thoughts, but intrusive thoughts don't seem to bother everyone, it's clear that something else is going on. While our intrusive thoughts might be upsetting or anxiety provoking, everyone has them, so they must be normal.

Our interpretation of our intrusive thought is really the view we take of it. If we believe that the intrusive thought is dangerous in some way it's clear to see how that might make us anxious.

Let's use a couple of examples:

Example 1

	Intrusive thought	Interpretation
Person A	Image of stabbing child	"Oh Yuk, imagine thinking such a weird thought, I certainly don't want to do that"
Person B	Image of stabbing child	"Oh God – what a terrible thing to think. If I'm thinking like that it must mean I want to do it. I'm a terrible evil person."

Example 2

	Intrusive thought	Interpretation
Person A	Image of being in Doctor's waiting room and being told I have HIV	"Gosh, that would be terrifying, I'm glad I don't have to deal with that"
Person B	Image of being in Doctor's waiting room and being told I have HIV	"Oh my god. That would be dreadful, I'd better be careful not to get myself into that situation. I hope I haven't done anything to contract HIV"



In the examples detailed above it's clear to see how Person B might continue to feel anxious and try to get the thought out of their mind. Person A on the other hand, only feels anxious for a moment before they're able to get on with whatever else they might be doing.

You might think that the examples above are completely absurd, or you might be able to relate very easily to them. The view you take of these intrusive thoughts and your own are related to your own values and beliefs.

Have a think about your own intrusive thoughts and interpretations. Try completing Form 1 below. What are some of your common intrusive thoughts and interpretations? If you're having trouble thinking about your interpretation the following questions might be helpful:

- What is so bad about this thought?
- What does it say about me?
- Why would I be offended/upset/angry if someone else said these things?
- Do I think that having this thought is as bad as doing it?
- Do I think that I'm dangerous because of this thought?
- What are the dangers of having this thought?
- How is this thought going against my values?
- How does this thought go against my responsibilities?



FORM 1: INTERPRETATION OF INTRUSIVE THOUGHTS

Trigger	Intrusive thought or obsession	Interpretation: what the intrusive thought meant to me	Response: what I wanted to do



Have a think about some of your own intrusive thoughts.

Triggers: Who were you with? Where were you? What were you doing? How were you feeling?

Interpretations: Use the tips on the page above if you struggle.

Your response:

What would you usually have done?

What did you want to do?

Did you want to engage in a compulsion or try and block the thought out of your mind?

So then, we now know that it's the *interpretation* of the intrusive thoughts along with our behaviours that we're trying to change. Figure 1 below outlines a cognitive model of how the system works.

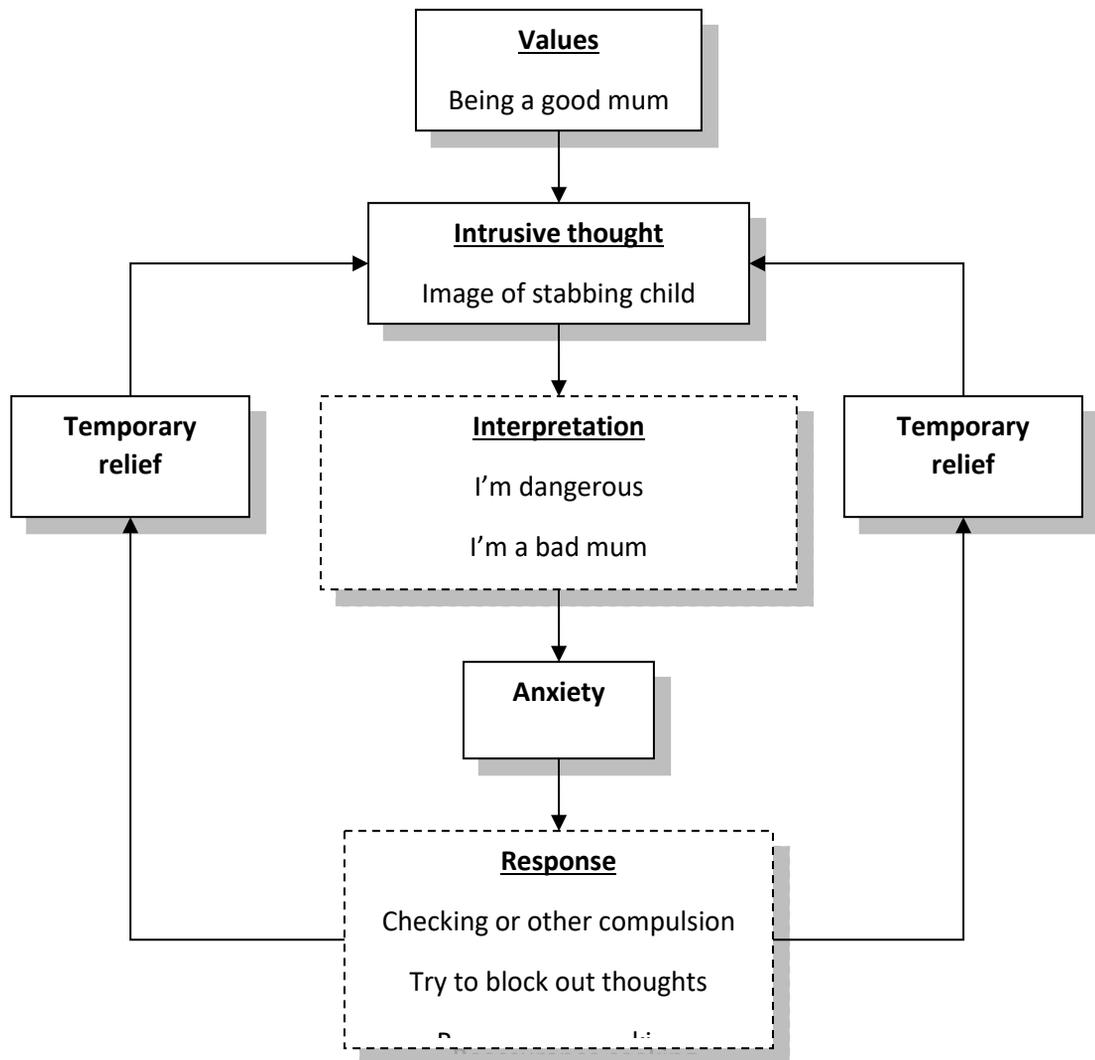


Figure 1: A cognitive model of OCD demonstrating how interpretation of intrusive thoughts and unhelpful responses keep the vicious cycle of OCD going.

Homework Task

Fill in the gaps using an example of your own obsessions/compulsions/intrusive thoughts . . .

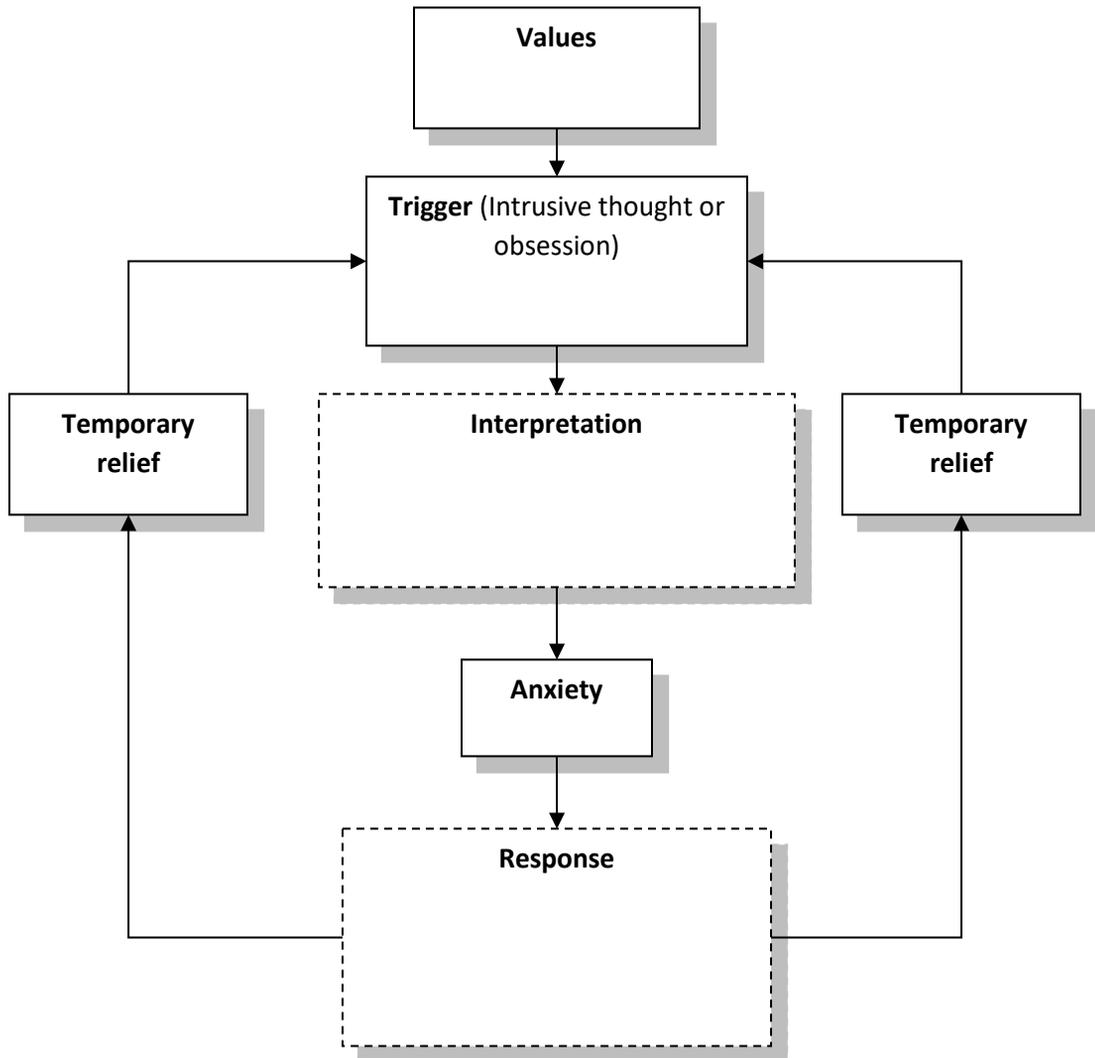


Figure 2: A cognitive model of OCD demonstrating how interpretation of intrusive thoughts and unhelpful responses keep the vicious cycle of OCD going.