

OCD SESSION 8

COURSE WORKBOOK





THE PROCESS OF RECOVERY

OCD affects every part of a person's life. It may disrupt your ability to function at work, in social situations and in the family. Once the symptoms improve and you approach a return to normal life, addressing the practical and emotional issues that may have arisen out of your OCD can be difficult.

Just as a lengthy illness can lower a person's self-confidence, making them feel insecure and vulnerable in situations that were once familiar and comfortable so can OCD. OCD can cause people to become quite dependent on those around them. People are often surprised at how frightened they are at the prospect of being independent and resuming their responsibilities. It is important to recognise that these reactions are a normal part of the recovery phase of OCD.

Recovery is a process, not a discrete event. At first you should ease into familiar activities with modest expectations. Slowly take on responsibilities and build your self-confidence. When you return to activities such as socialising and going to school or work, you will probably feel anxious. Allow yourself to make mistakes.

It can sometimes be helpful to think of yourself as being on a journey of recovery. When you first started working on your problems, it is likely that you had a range of different problems you wished to tackle. During the treatment, hopefully things have improved in at least some areas since you began your journey down this path. The following are some questions to help you identify **what** has been helpful for you and what things have helped you move on. Write down your thoughts in the space below each question:

MY JOURNEY:

Q. What is different now from before? What gains have I made? How have I improved in each of the following areas?

In my thinking?



In my feelings?

In my behaviour?

In my physical symptoms of anxiety?

In the practical situations, relationships and practical problems that I face?

In my actions?



PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Q. How can I apply these changes to future problems?

Q. What new skills have I gained that I can use to help me continue to improve?

Q. How can I continue to use what I have learned in my everyday life?

Q. What things might get in the way of me doing this? How can I deal with these obstacles?

What practical steps can I take?

Try to see if you can summarise what you have learned as **general rules** that you can apply in life.

You can write as many or as few rules as you want. The following example summarises what Jim (who experienced problems with OCD) has learned:



Example – Jim’s rules for life:

1. When I become aware of my triggers, I need to do something about the way I’m feeling before my compulsions take over.

*2. I **can** control my urge to perform compulsions by using the thought worksheets to challenge obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviours.*

3. Don’t withdraw from others– they can give me support and encouragement.

4. When I feel overwhelmed by problems – just tackle them one at a time as they arise.

Now, try this for yourself. What have you learned about getting and staying better?

MY RULES FOR LIFE

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

WATCH FOR EARLY WARNING SIGNS

One of the most important things is to be aware of vulnerable times so that you can plan out in advance what to do if you are beginning to feel worse for whatever reason. Sometimes, certain situations make people feel especially bad or seem particularly difficult to cope with. Everyone is different. Different problems may affect people in very different ways.

Try to write out a short list of warning signs to watch out for. This may include things like:



- *Altered thinking*: Noticing increased extreme, negative or unhelpful thoughts that begin to dominate your mind.
- *Altered feelings*: Such as anxiety.
- *Altered behaviour*: For example, of growing tension or restlessness, or a worsening of your sleep or appetite.
- *Situations*: Letting problems build up/blocking out the way you feel

They could include times such as:

- When you feel let down, rejected or abandoned by someone (e.g. after a relationship difficulty or breakdown).
- After something important seems to have either gone wrong or you have a fear that it will go wrong.
- When you think things are beginning to get out of control.



Example: Jim’s early warning signs.

- Jim has identified that his early warning signs are:
- *Altered thinking:* Thinking I’m a failure
- *Altered feelings:* Feeling anxious and tired.
- *Altered behaviour:* Just doing the ritual to put my mind at ease, its like a habit.
- *Altered physical symptoms:* Feeling really tense and jittery.

Situation, relationship and practical problems: Beginning to put off handing work in, and becoming unassertive in sorting things out. Letting problems go unaddressed.

MY KEY EARLY WARNING SIGNS

“I am going to watch out for times when I feel out of control and start thinking there’s no point trying to resist: I just can’t”.

Q. What are my possible *high-risk situations* in terms of setbacks?

1.
2.
3

Q. What do I need to do differently if I encounter these situations?

1.
2.
3

MY KEY EARLY WARNING SIGNS

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If you notice this **key early warning sign**, this means **do something now about your compulsions**.

Sometimes it can help to also talk to others who you know and trust to discover if they have noticed any other early warning signs. If they notice any, you could watch for these yourself, and also ask them to tell you if they notice these themselves.

PRODUCING AN EMERGENCY PLAN

Imagine you live in a house, which has a smoke detector. One day you hear it beeping while you are watching television. What do you do – do you ignore it and keep watching the television as if there was no problem – or do you get up, find out if there is a problem and try to deal with it? In the same way, if you notice any of your *Early Warning Signs*, you need to have planned what you do in response. This might include things such as planning to make changes:

An **emergency plan** can help you to plan out how to tackle any early warning signs you notice.

The following example shows how Jim decides to react to his early warning signs.

Example: Jim's emergency plan

Early warning sign	Emergency plan
<i>Altered thinking</i> : with anxious predictions and jumping to conclusions.	To identify and challenge extreme and unhelpful thinking.
<i>Altered behaviour</i> : checking the taps are switched off again and again until I am sure they are off	To slow down my actions, interrupt the cycle by resisting the urge to check and go for a long walk – these feelings of anxiety will pass
<i>Altered physical symptoms</i> : Feeling tense and agitated.	Use controlled breathing and relaxation.
<i>Altered feelings</i> : Feeling stressed and out of control.	Do all the above things, and speak with my friends/family to discuss how I feel. Facing up to my fears is the best way to overcome them. If things get worse, I can also arrange to see my doctor.



MY EMERGENCY PLAN

What is my "**emergency plan**" in the event of a set-back? Try to be very specific about the things you could do, or the people you could contact to help.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

THE CONCEPT OF A REGULAR REVIEW SESSION

It is important to **continue** using the information and skills that you have learned during the next few months and into the future. One of the advantages of using a workbook such as this one is that it allows you to set particular goals, and review how things have gone. You can also **do this yourself** by setting up a **regular review session**.

HOW TO DEVELOP A REGULAR REVIEW SESSION

Get a pen and mark the last day of each month as a "**review session**" on your calendar.

During this **review session**, try to spend 30 minutes or so to think back over the previous month.

Review session: How has the month gone?

Q. Try to think about things that have gone well and allow yourself to experience pleasure when thinking about this. What things have gone well? (Write them down here):

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Q. If some areas haven't gone as well as you would have liked, write them down here:

Q. Try to work out what it was about the difficult situation that led this to happen?

Q. Was there anything you could have done differently?

Q. How could you deal with it differently in future?

Write an **action plan** that you can put into practice over the following month. Try to set specific goals and targets. Plan in some activities that will lead you to have a sense of achievement or pleasure or to overcome problems such as avoidance or other unhelpful activities.

Plan things in a step-by-step way, being very specific about what you want to do and trying to be realistic in what it is possible to achieve.

How will you try to make sure that you carry out your plan?



What can prevent this happening? What might sabotage your plan?

How can you overcome any problems?

You can do this review session more often (e.g. every 2 weeks) if you find this helpful. The purpose is to spend a little time to stop, think and reflect, and plan how to move forwards. Finally, remember that you are not alone. Your health care practitioner or doctor is there as a resource to work with you and help you move forwards. You can discuss any problems or difficulties with them.

SUMMARY

In this workbook you have learned about:

- Summarise what you have learned about getting better and create a plan to use if you begin to feel worse again in future.
- Produce a list of your own “early warning signs” to help you watch out for signs of worsening OCD.
- Find out about how to set up your own regular review session to help you put into practice what you have learned.

PUTTING INTO PRACTICE WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED.

You may find it helpful to re-read this and other workbooks on a regular basis. Consider building this reading into your regular review sessions.



MY NOTES

(Adapted from Dr Chris Williams Overcoming Anxiety: Planning for the Future)