

Client Exercise Sheet 3

The Obsessional Story

Identifying the Story

During the last session, together with your therapist, you should have come a long way towards identifying the story behind your obsessional doubt. This story is likely to change over time, as there are likely important elements not yet included in the story. In the course of therapy, you can expect to become increasingly aware of the story behind your doubt, including all sorts of reasons that give the doubt credibility. This story will be addressed in many different ways in the course of therapy. This is why it's a good idea to start writing down your story, and to add new elements to it as you become aware of it.

Your Own Story

For now, write down your OCD story below. The story is composed by joining up the reasoning you identified in chapter four which justifies your obsessional doubt. You can use a separate piece of paper if you need more room:

This is the story behind your own personal doubt. Other people with OCD have similar convincing stories. For example, consider the following two OCD stories:

I can't go too far from home, or the city that I live in, because I don't know how panicky I might get. I might go really crazy and do something to myself. Who knows what is really wrong with me? One of my family members has schizophrenia, and I might have some serious disturbance also. I could be crazy enough to cut out my tongue. When I'm anxious, I can 'see' myself doing it, using a knife to cut it off. It feels I could actually do it. Then I'll be in the middle of nowhere without help. Then when I'm found I'll be sent off to a psychiatric hospital somewhere that I don't know, and they'll lock me up.

I have to check my stove each time I leave my apartment because I know I am an absent-minded person and that I can forget things. It even happened once that I forgot a pot on my stove; it could have set fire to my apartment.

Also, I heard that a fireman forgot a pot on a stove right at the fire station and it set fire to the station. It is reasonable to think that if a fireman forgets pots on stoves, it could happen to anybody and especially to those like me who tend to be absent-minded.

Relating to Stories

The degree to which you can relate to these stories probably depends on whether they lead to a similar conclusion as your own story. For example, if you yourself have doubts about contamination, then all manner of reasons that warrant the idea of the contamination story may make more sense to you, while the other story will make less sense to you. Still, in both cases, there is an equally valid story that leads up to these doubts. They are not really different, and one is not necessarily any more or less valid than the other.

Creative Exercise

Using your creative abilities, now we want you to make up a story for a different type of OCD, one you wouldn't normally obsess about. Pick a theme from one of the following: 1) park benches are contaminated; 2) you can never be sure you really posted a letter; 3) people could easily misunderstand you on the phone.

Illustration

List the reasons supporting the doubt. What would happen if you wove the reasons you wrote down there into a convincing OCD story? Try to use the devices to make the story as credible and real, and write the story down below:

Now, compare your own OCD story with the one you have come up with. How are the stories different? How are they similar? Write down below anything you have learned, wish to comment on or have questions about.

Client Training Card 3

The Obsessional Story

Learning Points (Front)

- Doubt is experienced as real because there is a credible story behind it.
- Your own OCD story is no more or less valid than any other OCD story.
- The story becomes real when you act on it.
- Change the story and you change the doubt.

Daily Exercise (Back)

Invent stories both positive and negative about objects you encounter during the day, and experience how these stories change your experience and attitude towards the object. For example, what if this mug was used by a beautiful woman who cared for it well and washed it regularly? What if this same mug belonged to a writer who kept his pens inside? When your OCD doubts appear, stop before plunging into them and recall the story behind them, and how repeating this story convinces you of their validity.