

# Client Worksheet 1

## When OCD Begins

### Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

OCD has two main components: obsession and compulsion. The most well-known compulsions are checking and washing, but there are many other types of compulsions as well that are not so easily identifiable. For example, if you have the obsession 'I might be a dangerous person', then you may frequently *mentally* check yourself to ensure you might not be harming others. So here, even though it is invisible to others, the mental checking is the compulsion.

### What is an Obsession?

In the majority of instances, an obsession is no more than a doubt about what is there. Often such doubts take the form of a *possibility* such as a 'what if . . .', a 'might be . . .' or a 'could be . . .' For example, if you check the door, then there is a possibility or doubt that motivates you checking. Perhaps you believe that you may not have properly locked the door, or that the lock might be damaged and therefore not properly locked. This is the doubt or possibility we are talking about.

### Compulsions Always Start with Obsessions

If you do not have the obsession, then there would be no need to do the compulsion. Likewise, if you did not have the obsession, then you would feel no anxiety or discomfort either. For example, if you have the obsession 'I might have left the stove on', then you may begin to worry about all sorts of possible consequences such as that the house might catch fire, or might worry about being responsible for harming others. You would get anxious, and will then begin to check the stove to reassure yourself that everything is OK. But none of these actions would take place if was not for the obsession.

### The Consequences of the Doubt Follow on from the Initial Doubt

For example, using the above door checking example, a worry about someone breaking into the house is not the primary doubt responsible for your anxiety. This is only a consequence of the doubt, where you feel you *might* not have locked the door correctly. Without the doubt, you would not worry about anyone breaking in, and this worry is not where the problem starts.

## Obsessional Doubts Do Not Come Out of the Blue

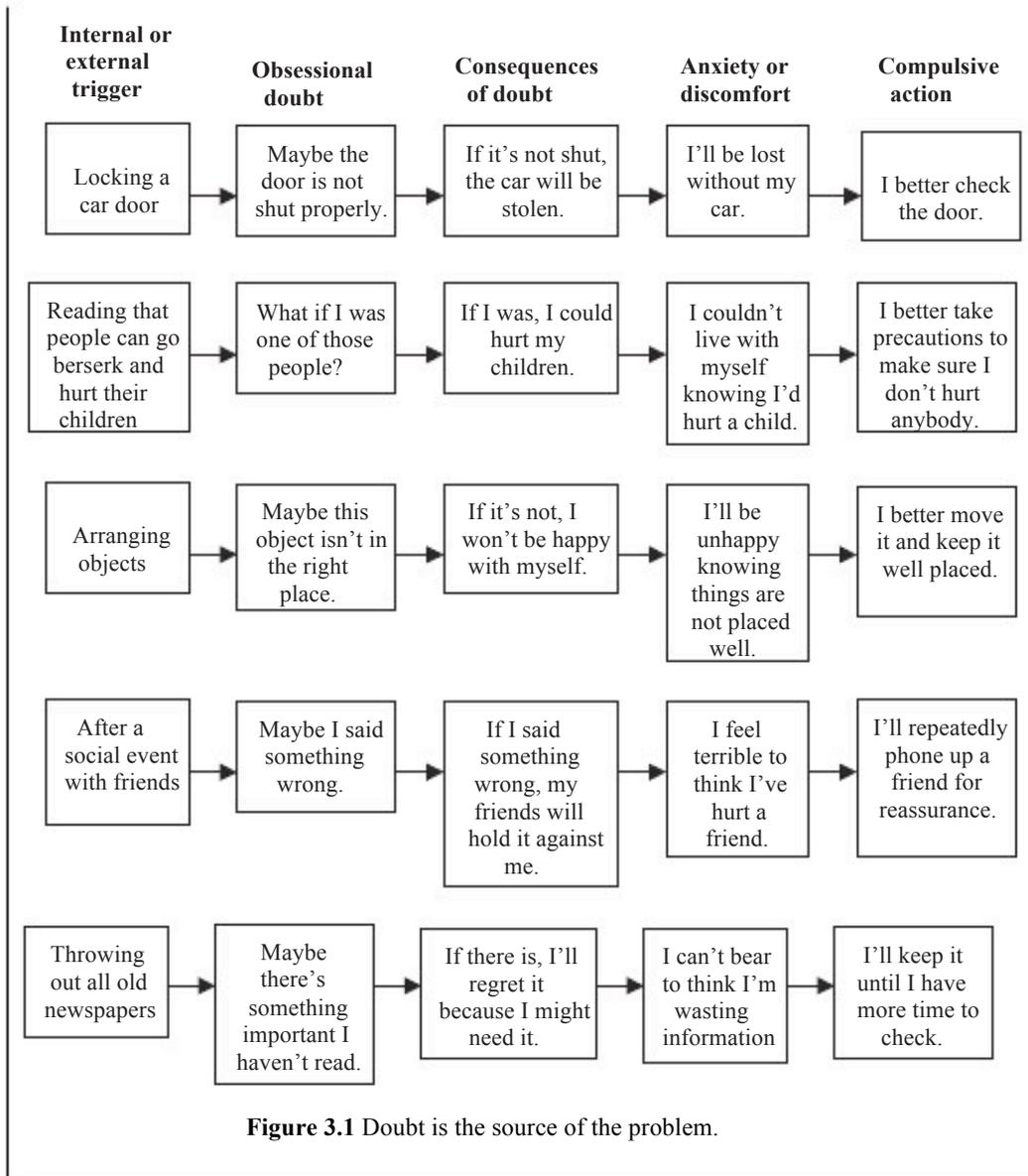
There may also be triggers for the doubt. For example, just walking past the door can be a trigger for the doubt that it might be left unlocked, in the same way that touching a metro pole could trigger the doubt that you might have been contaminated. You also may have all sorts of reasons why you believe the doubt to be realistic enough to act upon in the form of a compulsion. So it's not like there is nothing that precedes the doubt, which is an important aspect of obsessional doubt you will learn more about in therapy later on.

## Almost All Your Symptoms Follow from the Doubt

This is a very important point to understand. And if you did not experience the doubt, you would stay firmly grounded in reality, in the here and now. You would not get anxious and would not feel forced to do the compulsion. So the doubt is the source of the problem. This is good news, because once you begin to change the doubt, you will change everything that follows from it as well. It does not matter which kind of OCD you have (see Figure 3.1).



**Cartoon 3.** The door prize.



**Figure 3.1** Doubt is the source of the problem.