

Client Worksheet 10

Tricks and Cheats of the OCD Con Artist

OCD is a con artist, and a very good one and much better than a standard sales person repeating the same old pattern. OCD is far more dynamic, easily adapting to new situations, using every trick and cheat in the book to make you doubt reality. Just think about it for a moment. The OCD has not benefited you in any way, you feel the consequences of having OCD all the time, and yet, you are still buying its wares. OCD is a con man and a brilliant one at that.

To stand a chance against the OCD, you will have to begin start seeing through the tricks and cheats of the OCD con artist, identifying them and seeing what's wrong with them and how they strengthen/reinforce your OCD. To do this, the first thing to remember is where the tricks and cheats of the OCD are located.

They are part of your own OCD story and your inner dialogue in the form of thoughts, beliefs, associations and anything else that makes you doubt. They are those ideas and thoughts that somehow give credibility to your obsessional doubt. The second thing to remember is that it is never about the *content* of these beliefs, thoughts and facts. It is about how you apply these thoughts in a situation that is not really relevant, and often in contradiction to reality.

Both these two points are something you have already learned in the previous sessions. The new point, however, is to see how the OCD is often able to get around these two facts by using all manner of tricks and cheats, which nonetheless always come down to the same thing. And seeing how it always comes down to the same thing will help you expose the OCD con artist in a way that would be difficult to do if you were to debate with every little thought association and idea the OCD comes up with. So first point: never argue with the OCD. Better to simply see why what it tells you is wrong and then move on to spend your time on better things.

The one thing that all of the tricks and cheats of the OCD have in common is that *they make you believe its arguments have something to do with reality while they do not*. Each time you get into the OCD Bubble, the OCD will have accomplished just that. For example, one of the tricks of the OCD is make you believe that you are actually going deeper into reality when listening to the OCD. It may tell you for example that you are contaminated, because if you would just look with a microscope, it would be obvious. Likewise, it may tell you that the door may not be locked, because the hidden mechanism behind the lock might be broken.

Alternatively, if you suffer from pure obsessions, the OCD may tell you that even though there is no evidence that you have violent impulses, they might be there if only you would go deeper into your mind, into some hypothetical unconscious. In all these instances, the OCD makes it seem you are going deeper into reality, while the opposite is actually the case. Can you see how OCD is one slippery eel?

There are many tricks the OCD uses, but do not let yourself be confused by that. Whatever the trick, the OCD will always try to convince you that your doubt has something to do with reality while it does not. Below we have described some of the many tricks and cheats the OCD uses. See if you are familiar with any of them.

Mismatching

‘Mismatching’ is a very common trick of the OCD to confuse you. The OCD will often propose all sorts of events that have happened elsewhere, and that happened to someone else in order to make your doubt somehow more credible in the here and now. For example, if you have obsessions about locking the door, the OCD might say something like ‘My friend often drives off and forgets to lock his garage door, so mine might also be unlocked’. Or if you were about being poisoned, it might say something like ‘I heard of poisoned medicine one time, so my food could be poisoned’. The trick of the OCD is here that it uses all manner of apparently comparable events and irrelevant associations to justify the doubt. It makes it appear as if your doubt is relevant to reality.

Yet, none of these are relevant at all to the here and now. There is a *mismatch* between your own actual circumstances and these events. It is like a car salesman telling you to get rid of your old car, because he had a car of the same model and it broke down. Such arguments make no sense when your car is functioning fine. Another aspect of mismatching we have covered in the manual is blending where OCD blends OCD thinking and behaviour with a sometime ‘noble’ or ‘desired’ but unrelated attribute such as ‘being perfect’, ‘ecological’, or ‘safe’.

Out-of-Context Facts

The OCD is often very selective in how it applies information to your situation. It often comes up with facts, to give credibility to the doubt. For example, the OCD might say something like ‘Microbes do exist, so therefore there might be microbes infecting my hand’ or ‘People die unexpectedly all the time, so I might die now’. Such facts are often not incorrect, which is why they are so powerful in making you take the doubt seriously. However, they still do not have anything to do with reality in the here and now. The facts themselves may be true, but as applied in your situation they are false. These facts are used by the OCD entirely out of context. They have nothing to do with here and now. When the OCD uses out-of-context facts, it actually uses two tricks at once. Not only does it use ‘mismatching’, but at the same time it uses facts that seem so very true. It’s one of the more powerful cheats in the arsenal of the OCD, because it combines two tricks at once.

Living the Fear

One of the nasty tricks of OCD is that it can *simulate* reality, as if there actually was sense information in the here and now that justifies the doubt.

This is because the story of the OCD can be so convincing that you actually begin to experience the story ‘as if’ it was real. But just because you are able to imagine something does not make it real. For example, if the OCD convinced you that you are ill, then you might actually start feeling nauseous and weak. Or, alternatively, if the OCD convinced you that you might be sexual deviant, then you might imagine being like a sexual deviant so vividly that it makes you feel like you are one. Under these circumstances, it can be difficult to tell what is real and what is not. The key to remember here is that these feelings come *after* you started to doubt and worry. They are the result of your doubt, not the cause of it. They are not real even if it seems like they are.

Going Deep

The OCD is not deep even though it may present itself this way. Often, the OCD tries to go beyond reality by making it seem it is going deeper into reality, while in fact the opposite is the case. It always takes you away from reality. For example, as we mentioned earlier, the OCD might try to justify that your hands are contaminated and that there are germs on your hands by saying that if you would look with a microscope, it would be obvious that you are contaminated. But such arguments do not go deeper into reality but deeper into your imagination. So when the OCD presents you with something that seems deep, realize that the opposite is the case. OCD is actually quite superficial.

Reverse Reasoning

Upside-down reasoning is a key trick of the OCD, which is also often part of the many of the other cheats it uses. Normally, when we reason, we start with an observation in reality, and then come to a conclusion about what is there. So for example, if you see a door hinge coming loose, you might justifiably doubt that the door is not locked properly. The OCD often turns this reasoning completely upside down. It starts with an idea, or fact, and then comes to a conclusion about what is there. It is a bit of a bullying approach where reality does not come into the picture at all. For example, it might say, ‘People must have walked on this floor, therefore it is dirty’. This is similar to saying, ‘Cars break down all the time, therefore mine is probably broken as well’.

Distrust of the Senses or Self

And finally, the most frequently used trick of the OCD is that it makes you distrust your senses or your own self. It is the lifeblood of the OCD. If you trust in your senses or your own self, the OCD cannot exist. The obsession simply makes no sense if you were to take reality into account. Yet, the OCD will always try to convince you that you need to leave the world of the senses behind, and find resolution to a problem that is not really there.

Double Jeopardy

This is a nasty trick whereby the OCD gets you not because you tried to ignore it but exactly because you obeyed it. The principle here is OCD gets you if you do and if you don't. So for example you might go back and check that the light was switched off because OCD said it might not be. Now you're feeling reassured because it was off (as your senses and common sense told you all the time) but not for long. OCD now comes in with 'Ah, it was OK before you checked it, but now after you've checked it you may have made it unsafe'.
Cheeky eh!

Again, We Come Back to Testing it Out

A con trick noted before is for OCD to provoke a testing behaviour. For example, Matthew fears he may secretly enjoy pornography which he finds morally objectionable. So he seeks out photos to test himself. Then OCD says . . .aha, you must be perverted just to look at the photos. Sneaky O'Seedy, eh!

Let's Discuss It

Another trick is for OCD to invite you to discuss and consider your doubt or questioning as a way of resolving it. You start to doubt your competence in the face of knowledge of your competence. But just as you are about to dismiss it, OCD jumps in with 'Well, we really should consider this doubt, what does it mean, how it can be resolved. Let's consider it together and turn it over . . . and over . . . and over . . . etc.'

We alert you to all of these tricks above so that you can spot the OCD salespitch not by trying to argue with it, but by simply seeing how its tricks make your doubts irrelevant and false.

But maybe this time...

Another running argument is the "yes, but maybe this time the doubt is founded". Whatever the OCD has predicted in the past has never materialized. Normally this fact would be sufficient for you to have no more dealings with OCD.

Afterall, if every apparatus you bought from a shop was broken, you would probably not buy anymore. However, OCD with its trade mark 'maybe' gets to you with 'well maybe this time'. But since this 'maybe' resembles all the other false 'maybe' in the past, there is no reason to treat it differently.

But maybe later...

In a similar vein OCD may threaten consequences not immediately but later. This distant threat poses a particular problem with superstitious obsessions where the client may be convinced that a catastrophe could befall them not now but weeks, months or years ahead. Clearly the threat cannot be disproved by reality testing since it is in the future. However this 'maybe later' is an obsessional doubt construed in exactly the same way as other obsessional doubts and hence is equally irrelevant.



"The Gazette 1989..Travel Section..pg. 56? Yes, I have it. I knew it would be useful one day...but, er...where is it?"

Cartoon 13. The useful hoard.