

Client Exercise Sheet 1

When OCD Begins

The Sequence

During the therapy session, and as explained in the accompanying worksheet, you have learned that your symptoms follow naturally from a particular doubt. The manner in which OCD evolves, and how you eventually end up at the feeling that you have to engage in compulsive behaviours, we call the 'obsessional sequence'.

The Trigger

The obsessional sequence is usually set in motion with a trigger. This trigger can either be internal, or it can be external event. For example, if you suffer from doubts that you might hurt someone, this doubt might be triggered just by thinking about an argument you had with someone else a few days ago. Then, once the doubt has a hold on you, you may worry about the consequences, feel anxiety, and engage in some sort of compulsive behaviour, such as trying to block the thought out of your mind. The trigger elicits the doubt and the OCD begins with the doubt.

Your Own Personal Doubt Sequence

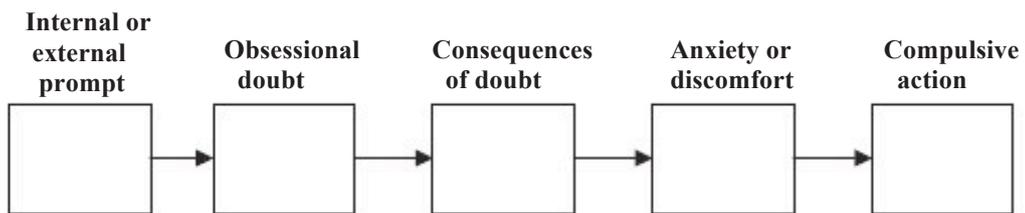
The specific obsessions and doubts of people with OCD can be very different, but the obsessional sequence is always the same. So if you are unaware of the obsessional sequence, it may be difficult to recognize yourself in other people's OCD. But by looking more closely at your own OCD, and applying it to the obsessional sequence, you will see it really is all the same. There is a trigger, a doubt, and everything else flows from there. Nothing makes this clearer than applying the obsessional sequence to your own obsessions.

David

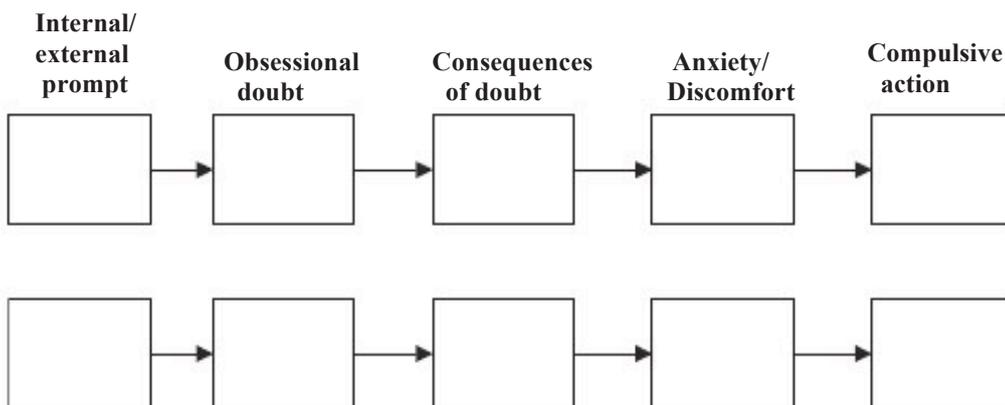
Below, you find an account from a client describing his obsessional thinking. Try to identify the following:

1. The trigger
2. The obsessional doubt
3. The anxiety or discomfort
4. The compulsive action

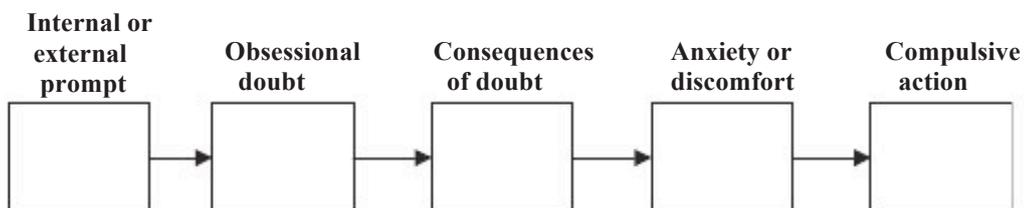
David has recently begun to feel anxious each time he is in the car, especially when he gets out of the driveway. The problem started 2 months ago. He had read about someone killing a child on the driveway, and shortly after Dave began to wonder whether something like that could not happen to him. Dave has even begun to avoid driving his car and now often takes the metro to work. Why risk ever to be thrown in jail and having to live with killing a child? Besides, it simply takes too long to even get out of the driveway. He is jittery and has a sinking feeling in his stomach. Each time, he would get out of the car, and check everywhere to make sure he did not hit anyone. He even checked under the car and behind the wheels, and still doubted whether he had maybe missed something.



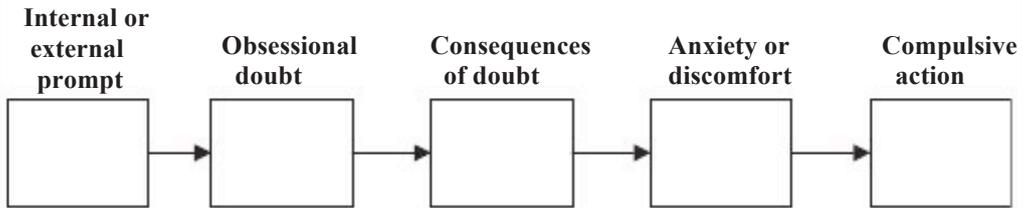
· So using the form below, slowly trace out and identify the obsessional sequence for one or two obsessions that have recently been bothering you the most:



Now, do the same for an obsession with which you may have been preoccupied in the past, but that has not been bothering you for a long time:



Lastly, try to come up with an obsession that another client with OCD might have, and yet means nothing to you.



Bring the exercise sheets with you for the next session to discuss your answers with your therapist. Write down below anything you consider important about what you have learned or that you wish to comment on. Also note down any questions you have.

Creative Exercise

Creating doubt through doubting. During the day, think of any action you performed during the day and ask yourself, 'Did I really do that?' Keep repeating the question and reflecting on whether you really did do it properly.

Example 1

You've just said goodbye to a friend on the phone, and both of you have hung up in a normal fashion. You ask yourself:

'Did I really say goodbye just now?'

'Maybe I thought I did, but it got distorted on the line'.

'Perhaps that's why he hung up. Maybe unwittingly I insulted him'.

'Maybe I've done this before without realizing'.

'How can I be absolutely sure I didn't say it?'

How is your doubt level about how you ended the call? More, less or the same?

Example 2

You turn off the television set and you see the light go out. You ask yourself:

'Am I sure I'm sure I turned the TV off?'

'Maybe I didn't really turn it off'.

'Maybe it looked like it was off, but it wasn't really or it came back on?'

'Maybe I should check it just to be sure'.

How is your doubt level about turning off the TV? More, less or the same?

Example 3

You've just been invited to a party by a friend. You say:

'Maybe s/he doesn't really want me there'.

'Maybe s/he felt obliged to invite me'.

'Maybe s/he is just embarrassed by me'.

'S/he could be hoping I don't turn up'.

How is your doubt level about being wanted at the party? More, less or the same?

Example 4

You're thinking of a close friend or relative you really like.

1. How sure are you that you like the person? Sure or unsure? Now rehearse the following doubts.

Rehearse the following statements:

'Maybe I don't really like him/her'.

'Maybe I just think I like him/her'.

'Maybe subconsciously I hate him/her'.

'Maybe I really want him/her to do badly'.

How sure are you now that you like the person? Sure, less sure or unsure?

Do you see how doubting creates more doubt? yes or no?

Client Training Card 1

When OCD Begins

Learning Points (Front)

- A doubt is about a possibility – a thought about what ‘could be’ or ‘might be’.
- Your symptoms of OCD begin with doubt.
- Consequences, distress and compulsions logically follow from the doubt.
- Without the doubt, you would remain firmly grounded in reality without any symptoms of OCD.

Daily Exercise (Back)

Over the next seven days, three times a day, when you are engaged in a compulsive activity, try to identify the obsessional sequence leading up to the activity, including the trigger, the doubt, the consequences and the anxiety.

You may find it useful to discover components by slowing down the sequence and slowing down your progression from one thought to another. Then ask yourself what would remain of the obsessional sequence if the doubt was not true. Imagine for a moment what it would be like if the doubt was false. Do not try to debate the doubt in your mind. Just ask yourself the question, ‘How much OCD would remain if the doubt was incorrect?’