

Module 1: Myths about OCD

- ▶ OCD symptoms lie on a continuum. Certain cognitive biases can promote OCD, for example inappropriately evaluating an intrusive negative thought as important or dangerous
- ▶ Genes influence, but do not determine whether one has OCD or not. They pave the way for possibilities that can be influenced by experiences and can turn life in one direction or another

Obsessions and compulsions

Obsessions	Compulsions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repetitive, intrusive thoughts, images, or impulses • Often involve exaggerated concerns • The content usually contradicts personal beliefs or values • E.g. „<i>The door knob could be contaminated with germs!</i>“ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repetitive physical and/or mental rituals • In OCD, compulsions are usually (not always) triggered by obsessions • Reduce anxiety and distress • E.g. Excessive hand washing

Exercise 1:

What specific obsessions do you personally have?

Obsession 1: _____

Obsession 2: _____

Obsession 3: _____

Obsession 4: _____

What specific compulsions do you perform?

Compulsion 1: _____

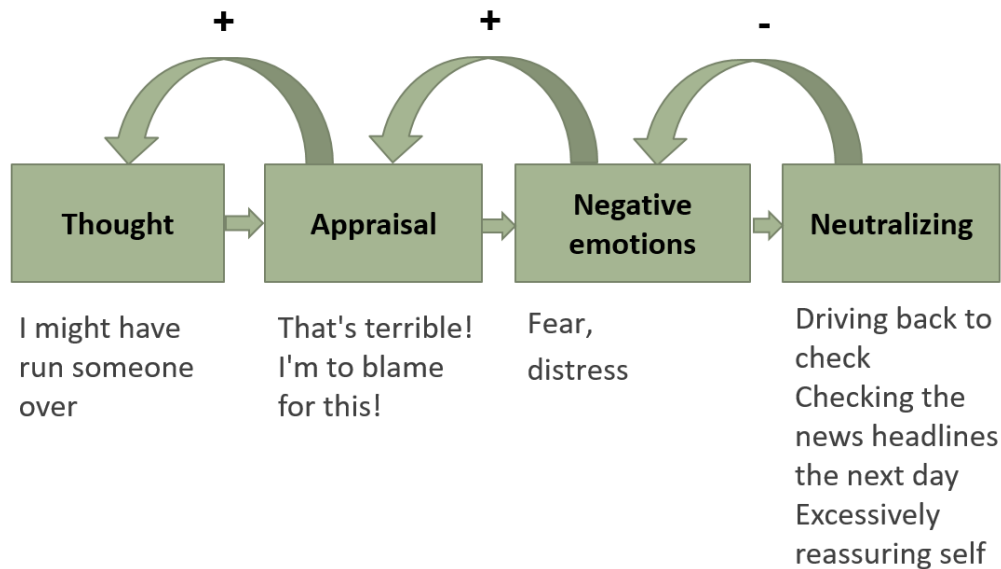
Compulsion 2: _____

Compulsion 3: _____

Compulsion 4: _____

Cognitive model of OCD

by Reinecker, 1994



Exercise 2:

Create your own personal cognitive model of OCD:

Thought: _____

Appraisal: _____

Negative emotions: _____

Neutralizing: _____

Avoidance behavior

- ▶ Avoiding situations that are related to obsessive fears or which may trigger compulsions
- ▶ Reduces fear in the short term, but increases it in the long term

Safety behavior

- ▶ Serves the same general purpose as avoidance
- ▶ Excessive or exaggerated actions taken to prevent negative or disastrous outcomes
- ▶ The fearful situation is not completely avoided. However, the fear is not fully faced
- ▶ E.g. Seeking reassurance from relatives/acquaintances
→ Leads to the false conclusion that this behavior alone has prevented negative outcomes from happening

Exercise 3:**Avoidance and safety behavior**

Use your own examples, become aware of your avoidance and/or safety behaviors.

The following questions may help:

- ▶ **Avoidance:** What do I avoid because of my obsessive fears, or because I don't want compulsive urges to be triggered?
- ▶ **Safety behavior:** What actions do I take to get through feared situations?

What you can do instead

- ▶ Face your fears! Approach instead of avoid feared objects/situations
- ▶ **BUT:** Choose situations that are realistic for you
- ▶ If you already have experiences with exposure and response prevention, practice your exposures
- ▶ Continue to hold back from compulsions and abandon any safety behaviors that you perform
- ▶ Tell your loved ones to not respond to your attempts at seeking reassurance, but rather to simply point out that you are seeking reassurance

Exercise 4:

A (farewell-)letter to your OCD

Ask yourself the question, "**Do I really want to change something and, if yes, what exactly?**". Be honest with yourself. What is troubling about your symptoms? How is OCD harming you? What does OCD take from you? Are you perhaps indecisive? Are there situations where OCD is helpful for you ("Better to be safe than sorry": it is better to do a compulsion than to be inattentive to your environment)? What do you have to give up when you decide to give up your OCD? Are you ready for this? Why?

Grab your pen and write a (farewell) letter to your OCD.

Here is an example from the self-help book "My Metacognitive Training for OCD" by Steffen Moritz and Marit Hauschildt as a suggestion:

Dear OCD,

As you have noticed, I made an appointment with a therapist last week and I got myself this book.

To make it short: I don't feel good with you anymore and I want you to leave.

All your threatening („Clean the kitchen or do you want someone to die from all the germs?", „Check again if the door is locked or do you want to risk a burglary?") and all your doubts („What happens if..?") made me unhappy. Instead of protecting other people, as you want me to believe, you have only brought harm to my friends and family because they all have to submit to you.

I don't even let my friends come to my house, because it would end in new checking and washing rituals. I don't have the strength anymore, you took it away from me. I also know, that there were times when I somehow needed you. I could hold tight to you if there was little else to hold on to.

Also now you offer me a short-term security - but for too high a price! If I would know that I still have 10 more lives to live I would probably endure this a little longer, but I only have this life. I want to dedicate myself to those things which are really important (family, friends, in the meantime forsaken hobbies like gardening) and don't want to listen to your horror stories anymore. That is the reason why I want to learn to get over you. This book is one of the actions which I am taking. You of course know that I am fickle and sometimes lack the power of endurance. But I have to finally say fare-well and live my life without you. And I can reassure you that I will not give up and I won't let myself get discouraged by setbacks.

I don't want to go down to your level, therefore - despite everything - I send you my best regards

and say goodbye!

Your former friend

Notes

Space for unanswered questions or problems that came up or experiences that you would like to talk about in the next session:

Other notes:
