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Think Outside The Box

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Breaking the Link

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Up until now, you have focused on the nature of OCD and its main principles. You should have a complete list of your obsessions and compulsions, but if you haven't done it yet, now is the right time to go back and do it. Also, if you practice relaxation on a daily basis, you should be ready for the next stage of the process.

Fear and anxiety are keeping you in the vicious cycle of OCD. Besides the irrational nature of your obsessions, these intense emotional responses create a distorted image of danger. In other words, anxiety tells you that a situation is dangerous, when in fact there's no real danger. This is the reason why your obsessions seem so critical and imperative.

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Quiz Time!

Quiz:
Psychology 101 Part 2

Quiz:
Psychology 101 Part 2

Quiz:
Flags in Europe

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Regain Your Logic

On a conscious level, you might be aware of everything you've learned so far, but when fear and anxiety strike, every last piece of reason and logical thinking may become washed away. In order to regain control of your behavior, let's explore a few ways to challenge your obsessive thoughts and images.

Challenge Your Thoughts

Most people believe that once they go through psychotherapy, their obsessive thoughts and

images will magically disappear. In reality, therapy only changes your perspective on negative thinking and irrational beliefs, NOT the thoughts themselves. It's about finding new ways of seeing and interpreting obsessive thoughts.

Question Your Thoughts

If you want to shed some light on your obsessive thoughts, seeing a cognitive-behavioral therapist is always helpful. However, let's see if you can begin to answer some questions, regarding your thoughts, on your own. Are they true? Are they helpful in some way? If your worries and obsessions are valid, how come others are not preoccupied by them as well? Most importantly, always ask yourself WHY.

An Example

In order to better illustrate this technique, here's an imaginary dialogue between a therapist and a client.

Client: Germs are everywhere. I have to wash my hands in order to stay healthy.

Therapist: What makes you think germs are that dangerous?

Client: Because germs and bacteria cause disease!?

Therapist: All of them?

Client: No. Not really.

Therapist: How come others don't get sick from germs?

Client: I don't know. Maybe I have a weaker immune system.

Therapist: Why do you think that? Did a doctor tell you that you have a weak immune system?

Client: No. It's just an assumption.

Of course this sample conversation is very simplified, but its purpose is to illustrate how our obsessions are fairly easy to penetrate with rational arguments. If you are willing to make an effort and play "the devil's advocate" with your obsessions, you will soon discover the irrational nature of your repetitive thoughts. Remember, the key to effectively challenging your thoughts, lies in specific, targeted questions.

The Cost-Benefit Analysis

This highly effective strategy consists of finding pros and cons for your obsessive thoughts. First of all, pick up a pen and choose an obsessive thought to write down. You can also use the list you have already created. In case you're dealing with an obsessive image, write a short description.

Next, divide the page into two columns. On the left side you have the cons and on the right you have the pros. Now, think carefully about your obsession and find as many pros and cons as you can.

How OCD Impacts Your Life

In theory, you should find more cons than pros because obsessions are intrinsically counterproductive and dysfunctional. However, you should also consider the magnitude of each pro and con. You will then have a clearer image of how OCD really affects your lifestyle. Even though you might have thought about this many times, writing it down, black on white, often helps provide a lot of additional clarity.

In case you find more pros than cons, don't worry. This exercise is still useful because it allows you to discover the "secondary benefits" of your OCD. In other words, these benefits keep your condition "alive".

Are You Really in Danger?

The main theme of our obsessive thoughts and images is usually danger. Whether we're afraid of contamination or losing control, our minds perceive obsessions as warning signs that tell us to be on guard. However, it's because of intense anxiety and fear that we completely ignore our rational selves and act upon whatever our intrusive thoughts tell us.

Pause and Question

Every time an intrusive thought or image appears into your mind, pause for just a fraction of a second and ask yourself a crucial question, "Am I really in danger?" Most of the time, the honest answer will be, "No". What makes you mistakenly perceive danger is actually the intense anxiety, caused by obsessive thoughts. Take advantage of this strategy and begin to challenge your obsessions. Once you start putting your intrusive thoughts to the test, you won't be so preoccupied with compulsions and other rituals.

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