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[Home](#) > OCD's Distortions

OCD's Distortions

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We know for a fact that mood disorders have both a cognitive and a behavioral component. The behavioral component refers to how this condition affects your actions. For instance, your compulsions represent the behavioral consequences of OCD. However, these compulsions don't just appear out of thin air.

For each compulsion, there must be something, within your mind, that triggers it and this is where cognitions (thoughts, images, ideas) come into play. We are now about to explore the main cognitive distortions, or irrational beliefs, of OCD. Moreover we will try to demonstrate the absurd nature of these cognitive distortions. Once you see them for what they truly are - nothing but absurd, irrational thoughts, you'll likely shift your perspective towards a more rational mindset.



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Overestimation of Danger

People who experience OCD often tend to “make mountains out of molehills”. For some, a speck of dust might mean chaos, and one mistake could equal ruin. Every small error is amplified a thousand times and any sign of danger must be eliminated at all costs. Although some fears are justified, in most cases we can’t even talk about danger because the chain of events leading to a perceived disaster is way too absurd and improbable. Worrying about every little thing that might go wrong is like spending days trying to figure out which numbers will win the lottery. It’s simply not worth the effort.

Constant Need for Certainty

We know for a fact that nothing is certain in this world. No matter how hard we try to control every detail of our lives, sooner or later, we come to realize that we’re all at the mercy of fate. Some of those who struggle with OCD have a constant need for reassurance. Whether it’s from their family and loved ones, or their boss and coworkers, reassurance is something that they crave.

Uncertainty Is Certain

We all want more certainty in our lives, someone to tell us that we’re doing a good job, or that the path we have chosen is the right one. Sadly, we cannot know for sure, until we reach the finish line. Naturally, just because certainty is an illusion, doesn’t mean that people should resort to mindless behavior. We minimize hazard and failure by taking calculated risks, not by double-checking a million times.

Life is made up of an infinite number of probabilities and you can’t calculate all of them.

Overestimation of Responsibility

Although the reasons are not yet clear, OCD can sometimes turn us into pathologically-responsible individuals. perhaps the phenomenon is somehow connected to our need for certainty, or maybe a childhood trauma. All we know for sure is that in some cases the nature of obsessions in OCD is interconnected with an irrational sense of responsibility. For instance, some people believe that if they don’t recite a certain prayer, God will punish them, even though God is depicted as the embodiment of goodness and mercy.

The Weight of the World

In some ways, overly responsible people are like Atlas, the mythical titan who held up the sky in Greek mythology. Unlike Atlas, they choose to hold the weight of the world on their shoulders by taking responsibility for everything, even for events that have absolutely no connection to them. As you can probably see, even if you haven’t experienced it on your own, the guilt of this unnecessarily assumed responsibility can be devastating for the individual.

Emotional Reasoning

You already understand the link between obsessions and compulsions. Anxiety, generated by intrusive thoughts, triggers a strong emotional reaction, along with the physical and behavioral

symptoms. People who experience OCD might interpret this emotional reaction as a sign of danger. Needless to say, they immediately resort to compulsive behaviors and all sorts of rituals meant to reduce the level of emotional distress.

Emotions and Reality

This cognitive distortion tricks us into believing that our negative emotions reflect the true nature of reality. Basically, the cause and effect relationship becomes turned upside down. The result might often be a torrent of irrational thoughts, such as, “Germs are dangerous because I’m afraid of them.” Basically, the gravity of a situation is no longer evaluated using external factors. Instead, we choose to interpret events through the prism of our emotions.

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