

Defining your obsessions

You now know what an obsession is and the motivation behind them. We will ask you to define your most distressing obsessions in a moment.

Roz defined her most distressing obsessions as being:

1. *'Fear of accidentally causing harm to myself, my child (or someone vulnerable – baby, old person) by passing on a contaminant.'*
2. *'Fear that my home will become overwhelmingly contaminated and disgusting so that I won't be able to function.'*

Isaac defined his obsession as:

'Needing certain possessions to be placed in specific ways otherwise I feel intensely uncomfortable and cannot relax or "switch-off".'

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Jack identified his obsession as:

'The fear I might kill a cyclist and forever feel terribly guilty about it.'

Gail described her distressing obsession as:

'A fear that I will lose control and hurt my baby.'

Paul wrote of his most distressing obsessions as:

1. *'A fear that I will discover I'm a paedophile.'*
2. *'A fear that I will be wrongly accused of being a paedophile because of something I accidentally look at on the internet.'*

Try to define your main obsessions and fears below. If your own obsession (or something similar) has not been mentioned so far, it's probably best to discuss your situation with a mental health professional to check whether you have OCD or not.

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Defining your compulsions

Roz wrote down her most frequent compulsions as being:

1. *Washing my hands three times with soap and very hot water.*
2. *Using my elbow or a tissue to touch a door handle or tap.*
3. *Wiping floors, carpets and surfaces with antibacterial wipes.*

Isaac saw his most frequent compulsions as:

1. *Having to place items such as my clothing in a particular order.*
2. *Having to repeat actions such as walking through a doorway.*

Jack defined his compulsions as:

1. *Checking by re-tracing my journey and car, looking for signs of an accident.*
2. *Seeking reassurance from the police and mentally reassuring myself that I did not cause an accident.*

Gail identified her most frequent compulsions as:

1. *Monitoring myself whenever I'm near Harry (my baby).*
2. *Reassurance seeking that I did not harm Harry.*

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3. *Researching the internet and forums for information about intrusive thoughts in new mothers.*

Paul described his most frequent compulsions as:

1. *Monitoring sensations in my genitals when I'm near a child.*
2. *Checking and deleting my internet history.*

As you did for your obsessions, please write your most common compulsions in the space below. You can also rate them in terms of how much distress you think would occur if you stopped doing each compulsion on a scale of 0–100, where 0 is no distress and 100 is extreme distress.

Don't worry if your exact compulsion is not listed above. We are constantly amazed by how often a new patient will describe a compulsion or variation on a theme that we have not seen before. Most people with OCD have more than one compulsion, with one or two usually predominating. Try to link them with your obsession.

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OVERCOMING OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER

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Defining your avoidance and safety-seeking behaviours

Roz wrote down her most frequently used avoidance and safety-seeking behaviours as:

- 1. Avoiding touching objects or surfaces that I think may be contaminated.*
- 2. Avoiding touching babies, new mothers or old people who may be vulnerable to my contaminants.*

Isaac saw his most frequently used avoidance and safety-seeking behaviours as:

- 1. Avoiding my desk or wardrobe unless absolutely necessary.*
- 2. Trying to avoid certain numbers.*
- 3. Trying to avoid walking through doorways unless I really need to.*

Jack described his main avoidance or safety-seeking behaviours as:

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- 1. Avoiding driving at night, at sunset or sunrise, or if it's raining, as far as possible.*
- 2. Giving cyclists a very wide berth when I overtake them.*

Gail identified her most frequently used avoidance and safety-seeking behaviours as:

- 1. Avoiding being alone with my baby.*
- 2. Avoiding any films or TV programmes that contain violence.*

Paul described his most frequently used avoidance and safety-seeking behaviours as:

- 1. Avoiding close contact with my children as much as I can.*
- 2. Keeping my use of the internet to a bare minimum.*

Again, as with your obsessions, please write your most common avoidance and safety-seeking behaviours in the space below. Try to group them according to the obsession – for example the avoidance linked to your fears of contamination then to your unacceptable thoughts or whatever. You can also rate them in terms of how much distress would occur if you stopped using them on a scale of 0–100, where 0 is no distress and 100 is extreme distress. This will probably need a separate page as it can become very long!

Avoidance and safety seeking linked to fears of contamination

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Avoidance and safety seeking linked to being responsible for causing harm

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WHAT IS OCD?

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Avoidance and safety seeking linked to unacceptable thoughts

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Avoidance related to order, symmetry or completeness

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OVERCOMING OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER

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Avoidance related to other fears and doubts

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WHAT IS OCD?

Motivation

We have alluded to the motivation that your OCD has throughout this chapter. If you were to talk to your OCD, what would it say it was motivated by? For example, it might be that it wants to avoid harm happening to yourself or valued others (e.g., get ill; die); to avoid distressing thoughts or feelings (e.g., anxiety; sadness; disgust); to avoid yourself being a bad or immoral person; or to avoid the feeling of being 'not just right' or incomplete.

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Understanding these motivations is important because change will involve acting in the opposite direction, tolerating the feelings and testing out your expectations.