

Understanding OCD

It's normal to want to keep yourself and others safe, to be a good and responsible person, and to enjoy life without constant worry. These are healthy, human desires.

OCD becomes a problem when the mind tries to find ABSOLUTE CERTAINTY about FEARS, working too hard to guarantee that nothing bad will happen.

This effort often creates a pattern of worry, doubt, and repetitive checking that strengthens over time.

OCD involves:

Obsessional thoughts
(unwanted, repetitive ideas, images, urges, or body sensations).



Compulsive responses
(mental or physical actions to reduce anxiety or feel "sure" or SAFE again).



The BRAIN then begins to:

- ★ Treat normal thoughts as DANGEROUS
- ★ Uses rituals to feel safe

**THIS PATTERN TEACHES THE BRAIN THAT
THOUGHTS ARE**



KEEPING THE CYCLE GOING

Adapted From:

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Melissa Barsotti, LCSW, Mindful Therapy Practice (2025)

The OCD Cycle

OCD began the moment you experienced your first Obsession =

- Can often present as

"What If"

Thought/picture/videos/
feelings/body sensations/urges

Obsession

- Repetitive
 - Intrusive
 - Unwanted
- Thoughts/pictures/videos/
feelings/body
sensations/urges

Teaches the brain that the
compulsion(s) worked, they lowered the
"alarm"/experienced Anxiety.
This Results in the obsessions becoming
more and more important, strengthening
this loop.

Immediate
Short-Term
Relief

Raising an Alarm of danger or
threat

Anxiety

Resulting in thoughts/urges that
communicate "If I don't fix this,
something bad/harm might
happen."

Compulsions

Actions or mental rituals to try to reduce
the "danger," or make things "right" again.

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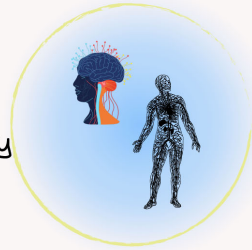
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OCD Review

OCD is a Brain-Based mental health condition that affects how people experience and respond to internal

- Thoughts
- Pictures
- Videos
- Feelings
- Body Sensations
- Urges

Occurring internally in the brain, nervous system, and body



Involves patterns of

UNWANTED

- Thoughts
- Pictures
- Videos
- Feelings
- Body Sensations
- Urges



OBSESSIONS



Repetitive Actions or Mental Rituals



COMPULSIONS

That are used to **REDUCE ANXIETY**

Or **PREVENT**

Something the brain now believes is “Bad/Wrong” from happening.

OCD is **NOT ANYONE’S FAULT.**

Your obsessions and compulsions are in **NO WAY** a reflection of your intelligence, worth or strength. Please know that self-criticism only makes the Obsession Compulsion cycle stronger and slows down your recovery.

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Let's Get To Know The Obsessions

Obsessions often communicate doubt in the form of "what if" or "could be" statements/pictures/videos/urges/body sensations.

I invite you(s) to write down all of the What If/Could Be Obsessional Doubts you are aware of right now:

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Rules

I invite you(s) to notice what rules your brain has come up with to keep you “safe.”

The rules our brain creates to feel safe from our obsessions often end up feeding more doubt and uncertainty.

Trying to follow the brain’s rules about what feels safe or right gives temporary relief, but it strengthens the cycle of doubt.

The mind’s efforts to stop the worry only convince it that there’s something to worry about.

Take a moment to notice any “rules” your brain has created around your obsessions, such as things you(s) feel you must do, avoid, or think in order to feel safe or certain. There’s no need to judge them; just begin to list or name them with curiosity.

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Rules

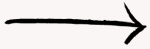
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False Self Patterns

Sometimes, when we have been hurt, scared, or criticized, our mind creates a False Self, a protective version of us that tries to keep us safe. This False Self often makes up rules about how we should think, feel, or act to avoid pain or rejection, for example, "I must not upset anyone" or "I can't make mistakes."

Over time, these rules can grow into deeper fears or beliefs about who we are, such as "I'm bad," "I'm unlovable," or "I'm not safe." These are called False Self Themes.



Think of Themes as:

- False Self Patterns
- False Self Story
- False Self Belief
- False Self Fear —————> Deep worry about what might happen if we don't follow our mind's rules.

When these fears are activated, the brain may produce different kinds of content, such as thoughts, pictures, mental videos, urges, or body sensations as a way of warning or protecting us. These experiences can feel very real and alarming, even though they come from the brain's attempt to prevent harm or discomfort. The False Self reacts by trying to control, fix, or avoid this discomfort, which can strengthen the cycle of fear and self-doubt.

Noticing these patterns helps you(s) return to your true self, the part that can feel fear, stay kind, and move toward what matters most.

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The Many False Self Patterns

Each person's False Self learns its own ways to try to keep them safe. These patterns often come from moments of fear, criticism, shame, or uncertainty. Over time, the False Self begins to form deep worries or beliefs about what might happen if we are not careful enough, good enough, or in control.

The brain then creates content — thoughts, pictures, mental videos, urges, or body sensations, that match these fears. This is the brain's way of trying to warn or protect us, even when there is no real danger.

When these fears are activated, the brain may produce different kinds of content, such as thoughts, pictures, mental videos, urges, or body sensations as a way of warning or protecting us. These experiences can feel very real and alarming, even though they come from the brain's attempt to prevent harm or discomfort. The False Self reacts by trying to control, fix, or avoid this discomfort, which can strengthen the cycle of fear and self-doubt.

Common False Self Patterns

1 Fear of Being “Bad” or “Immoral”

The False Self may believe, “If I am not perfectly good, I am bad.” This pattern can bring strong guilt, shame, or self-criticism, often followed by urges to prove goodness, avoid mistakes, or seek reassurance.

2 Fear of Causing Harm

The False Self may say, “If something goes wrong, it will be my fault.” This pattern can lead to checking, mental reviewing, or replaying memories to make sure no harm has occurred. It can show up as thoughts, images, videos, feelings, body sensations, or urges of responsibility for others' safety.

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Common False Self Patterns (Continued)

3

Fear of Losing Control

The False Self may worry, "If I lose control, something terrible will happen."

This can include urges to monitor thoughts, emotions, or sensations closely. The body may feel tense or restless, as the nervous system stays alert for danger.

4

Fear of Not being Enough

The False Self may whisper, "I have to be perfect, calm, or strong to be worthy."

This pattern can lead to exhaustion, self-pressure, or comparing yourself to others. It often hides a wish to feel safe, accepted, and loved as you are.

5

Fear of Uncertainty

The False Self may believe, "I must know for sure or be certain before I can rest."

This can create loops of doubt and seeking answers, even when no full certainty is possible. The brain keeps searching, trying to end discomfort, but the search only grows stronger.

6

Fear of Disapproval or Rejection

The False Self may believe, "If others don't accept or approve of me, I'm not okay."

This pattern can lead to people-pleasing, overexplaining, or avoiding situations that might cause tension. Deep down, it often reflects a wish to feel seen, accepted, and connected just as you(s) are.

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Common False Self Patterns (Continued)

7

Fear of Becoming Sick or Fragile

The False Self may believe, "If I'm not careful, I will get sick or something is wrong with my body."

This pattern can lead to monitoring sensations, searching for reassurance, or avoiding activities that feel risky. Deep down, it often reflects a wish to feel safe, strong, and in control of your health.

8

Fear of Having Bad Intentions

The False Self may believe, "What if I secretly want to harm, manipulate, or do something wrong?"

This pattern can bring strong guilt, confusion, or self-doubt, leading to mental checking or reassurance seeking. Deep down, it often reflects a wish to feel good, trustworthy, and aligned with your true values.

9

Fear of Being Doomed or Beyond Help

The False Self may believe, "Something is deeply wrong with me, and nothing can fix it."

This pattern can bring feelings of hopelessness or despair and may lead to searching for proof that things will never get better. Deep down, it often reflects a longing for hope, healing, and the reassurance that change is possible.

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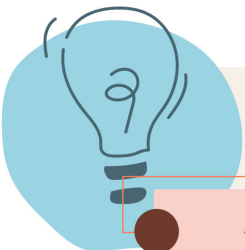
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Reflection: Recognizing the False Self

Take a few moments to reflect on which False Selves or patterns feel most familiar to you(s).

- Which ones show up most often when you(s) feel afraid, uncertain, or responsible?
- What “rules” or “warnings” do they tend to repeat?



Moving Forward

Helpful Tip

The next time an obsession appears (in any form), try pausing for a slow breath.

- You(s) can gently tune into your True Self/System, the part that can notice fear without obeying it.
- There is no need to argue, explain, or find reassurance.
- Now you(s) know what this is .
- You(s) can let these obsessions pass, just like junk mail; not personal, not dangerous, just something your brain sent that you(s) don't have to open.



Let's Get To Know The Compulsions

Take a moment to gently observe your day or week.

What actions, mental rituals, or habits do you(s) notice yourself/System doing to feel “just right,” safe, or certain?



What situations, feelings, or thoughts tend to bring up these urges?

If possible, notice how much time these actions take, even a rough guess is enough.

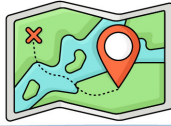
There is no need to judge or change anything right now.

This practice is simply about noticing how the False Self tries to protect you(s), and how much space those patterns may take in your day.

Awareness is the first step toward freedom.

[illegible]

Getting to Know Your True Self Through Values



1. What are your values?

Being human is complicated, busy, chaotic, you name it. When we have our values identified, we can use our values as a compass to how we respond/react to whatever life throws at us.

With this compass, we are more likely to live a life that is aligned with our values and authentic self/system.

Exercise: Take a moment to identify your top 5 values, using the list below. Feel free to include values that may not be listed on the table.

Suggestions for Systems:

Step 1. Kindly invite system members/parts who want to participate into your shared inner place where you/your system gather for collective reflection or problem-solving.

Step 2. Acknowledge every system member, including those who choose not to participate. Remind them they are safe, not in trouble, not being defiant, and that choosing not to join is okay. Let them know the system will still support them in the best way possible.

Step 3. Invite each system member who wishes to participate to share their top value(s). Take time to listen, notice where values overlap or differ, and reflect on how all of these can help guide care for the whole system.

List of Values

Accountability	Curiosity	Humility
Achievement	Dignity	Humor
Activism	Diversity	Inclusion
Adaptability	Efficiency	Independence
Adventure	Eco-Consciousness	Initiative
Altruism	Environment	Integrity
Ambition	Equality	Intuition
Authenticity	Ethics	Job Security
Autonomy	Excellence	Joy
Balance	Fairness	Justice
Beauty	Faith	Kindness
Career	Family	Knowledge
Caring	Financial Stability	Leadership
Climate-Consciousness	Forgiveness	Learning
Collaboration	Freedom	Legacy
Commitment	Friendship	Leisure
Community	Fun	Love
Compassion	Generosity	Loyalty
Competence	Grace	Making a difference
Confidence	Gratitude	Nature
Connection	Growth	Openness
Contentment	Harmony	Optimism
Contribution	Health	Order
Cooperation	Heritage	Organization
Courage	Home	parenting
Creativity	Honesty	
cleanliness	Hope	

List of Values (continued)

Patience	Self-Discipline	Tradition
Patriotism	Self-expression	Travel
Peace	Self-Respect	Trust
Perseverance	Serenity	Truth
Personal Fulfillment	Service	Understanding
Power	Simplicity	Uniqueness
Pride	Spirituality	Usefulness
Recognition	Stewardship	Vision
Reliability	Success	Vulnerability
Resourcefulness	Sustainability	Wealth
Respect	Teamwork	Wellbeing
Responsibility	Thrift	Wholeheartedness
Risk-taking	Time	Wisdom
Security		



In the Moment: Pause, Anchor, Choose

Helpful Tip

Choosing From the True Self

When an obsession or the urge to do a compulsion appears, pause for a slow, steady breath. Notice what is happening, without judgment.

①

What Feels Safe Enough Right Now?

Identify one of your three chosen anchors (for example, your breath, your feet on the ground, or a calming image).

Allow that anchor to remind your body that you are here, in this moment.

②

From my True Self/System, what value(s) do I/We want to act from right now?

Which of my chosen values could guide my next step, word, or action?

What would it look like to let this value, not the obsession or false selves, lead the way?

③

Take one small action

Take one small breath that aligns with the values you(s) have chosen above.

You(s) do not need to engage with the obsession or compulsion.

You(s) can choose to act from your True Self, guided by what truly matters.

Tips for HOW TO Practice Mindful Observation

Identify 3 Anchors

An Anchor is something you come back to, to help you regain balance, calm.

What are your Anchors?

Tips: It is helpful to identify anchors that you(s) will always have easy access to, such as parts of your body that have no negative associations, such as:

- Back
- Breath
- Fingers
- Hands
- Toes
- Feet firmly on the ground
- Clavicle
- Closing of the eyes

Choose a Mindful Attitude to Guide You



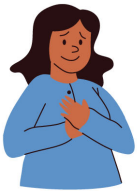
Let go of what you cannot control



ACCEPT that the discomfort you feel is temporary



Trust that you(s) have the resources
Trust that you(s) have the tolerance and patience



Embrace **NON-JUDGMENT** and grant Self/System
GRACE and **COMPASSION**



Notice thoughts, feelings, body sensations, and system members/parts, with gentle curiosity. Approach all like an explorer, open to learning. Even when things feel strange, uncomfortable, or unfamiliar, ask questions without making assumptions, meeting all experiences with openness.

Let Go
Accept
Trust
Non-Judgment
Compassion
Curiosity

Choose a Mindful Attitude to Guide You Reflection

What will You(s) make efforts to Let Go of?

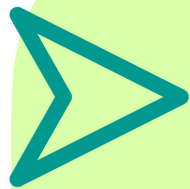
What will You(s) make efforts to ACCEPT?

What will YOU(s) make efforts to embrace and TRUST?

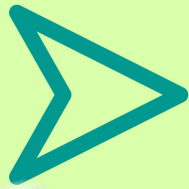
What will You(s) make efforts to NOT JUDGE & Invite Compassion for?

**What will You(s) make efforts to be curious about?
What non-judgmental and kind questions can You(s) ask?**

Mindful Skills:

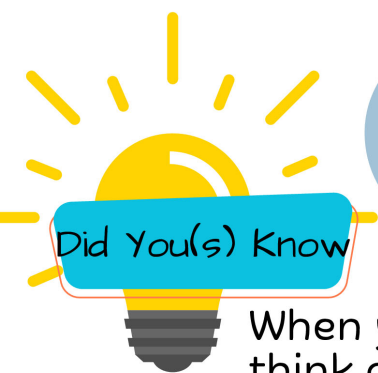


Watch/observe



Let Go





Self/System Loving Kindness & Compassion

When you/your system notice dysregulation and find it harder to think clearly or complete tasks, gently remind yourselves this is not a personal failing. In these moments, practice offering your self/selves/system kindness and compassion. Research shows that self-compassion can calm the nervous system, reduce shame, and support clearer thinking.

Dr. Kristin Neff, author of *Self-Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself*, identifies the following three key components involved in self-compassion:

1. Self-kindness: Being gentle and understanding with ourselves, rather than critical and judgmental.

2. Recognition of our Common Humanity:

Acknowledging that as humans, we are all imperfect. This allows us to feel connected to others, vs isolated with our suffering.

3. Mindfulness: Being present and aware of our experience as it is occurring in real time. Acknowledging our suffering, rather than ignoring it or exaggerating it.

Why is Self-Kindness and Self-Compassion absolutely necessary for healing and growth?

Our nervous system must be in a place of safety and connection in order for us to be curious and explore new things.

Imagine teaching a child how to ride a bicycle for the first time, with a harsh tone of voice and messages of criticism?

This critical and judgmental approach is less likely to promote encouragement, joy, curiosity, or exploration.

When learning to ride a bicycle, we are likely to fall a few times. With a kind and compassionate approach, we are more likely to quickly fall & try again.

You(s) are invited to pause with gentle eyes, a gentle heart, and gentle words. Notice what gentle words you would like to gift yourself/selves/system.