

Car on Road

“Hit-and-run OCD” is a common obsession in which the individual fears they have hurt or even killed someone while driving without realizing it. For example, if they drove over a bump, maybe that was a person. There is a fear of driving off without claiming responsibility or knowing for sure if someone was hurt. A frequently seen compulsion is then checking in the mirrors or even driving back around to make sure they didn’t hit someone.

My fears with driving were similar in root, but a little different. For me, the obsession was over driving mistakes I was fully aware I had made. For example, if I accidentally drove through a red light, I would then obsess for hours, days, weeks even about all the terrible things that could have happened. I knew no one had gotten hurt, but I still felt a need to claim responsibility for what could have been.

Because I didn’t have a car on campus in college, and I only drove occasionally when home for the summers, it was easy for this fear to turn into rampant avoidance. I quickly took up offers for someone else to drive, either a friend or relative, and when I did drive, I was terrified. In ERP fashion, I started with small drives by myself. I didn’t intentionally make driving mistakes, but when small blips happened, as they do when you’re out of practice and even when you’re experienced, I resisted the urge to ruminate. I also used scripting and would recite “maybe” statements while driving. “Maybe I could have hit someone or even killed someone. Maybe I will make a mistake while driving and have to live with that guilt for the rest of my life.”

Slowly but surely, driving went from terrifying to scary, to a little anxiety-provoking, and then eventually to relaxed while singing along to the radio. Now, I drive without thinking about OCD 99% of the time. Sure, I still have some residual fears of driving others and being directly responsible for their safety, especially children, but I’m willing to continue to drive.

On this page, I challenge you to get gruesome, if you are willing. Maybe you draw pedestrians that could be hit on the sidewalk or even a body lying in the road behind you, and you continue to drive on without going back to check. Maybe you draw a police car driving after you. You could draw a car accident you caused or a red light you sped through. The opportunities are pretty limitless but so is your ability to face your fears.

