
LIVING BEYOND REGRET, MISTAKES, AND POOR CHOICES TO OVERCOME REAL-EVENT OCD

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

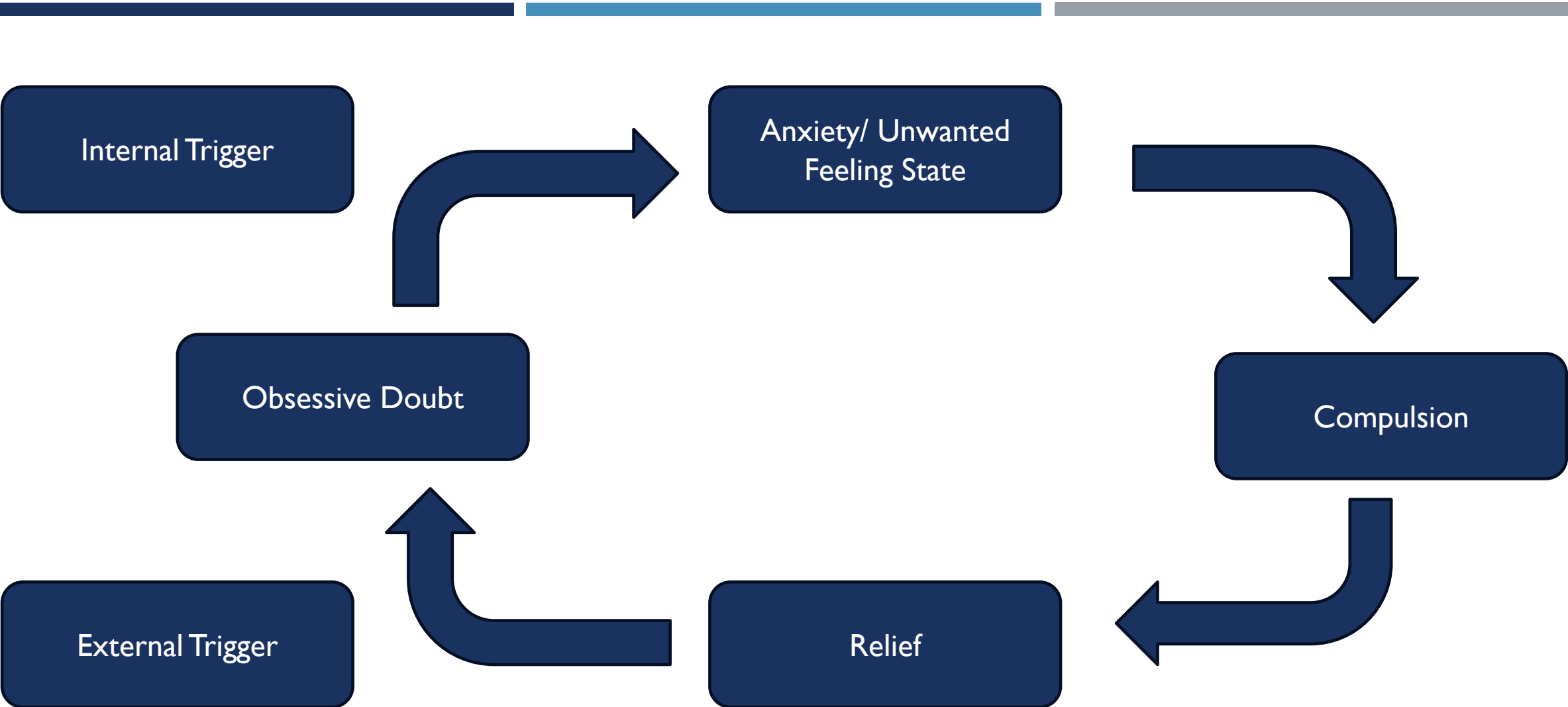
- We will discuss what Real Event OCD is and how it functions within the OCD cycle
- We will discuss the role of guilt, shame, and responsibility within RE-OCD
- Discuss treatment options for RE-OCD, including ACT, CBT, and ERP



WHAT IS OCD?

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE OCD CYCLE





OCD VS RE-OCD

OCD is a pattern of unwanted, intrusive thoughts, feelings, images, sensations or urges, causing marked distress, dealt with through overt or covert compulsions (i.e. thoughts or actions).

Real Event OCD Theme

- Focuses on a past event that did actually happen* and how they might effect the future
- Compulsions are done to gain certainty about the facts and effect of the event and on eliminating guilt

Other OCD Themes

- Themes focus are unverified, possible, and generally future-based
- Compulsions serve to ensure the feared outcome will not happen or to get emotional reassurance and security

*More on that in just a moment

TRIGGERS AND OBSESSIONS EXAMPLES

- Did I get drunk and sexually assault someone in college?
- I stole something in 7th grade. Will people find out and get me fired
- I flirted with a guy who wasn't my boyfriend. I might cheat or be unfaithful again.
- Will I be cancelled because I made homophobic or racist jokes in high school
- Will accidentally looking at child pornography 10 years ago get me arrested?

Absence of clear memory
News
Social Media
Conversations with friends
Movies, Television shows, etc.

REAL EVENT COMPULSIONS

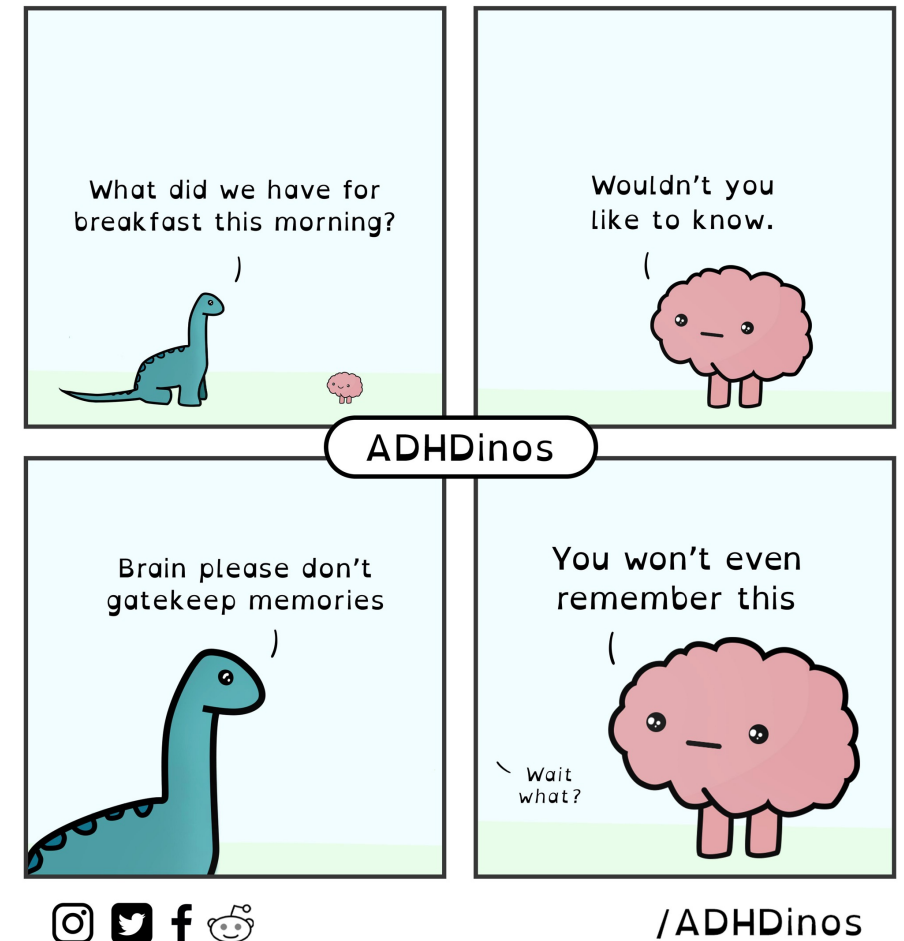
- **Reassurance Seeking**
 - Friends
 - Reddit
 - Facebook
 - Other social media
- **Googling**
- **Reading news reports**
- **Confessing**

REAL EVENT MENTAL COMPULSIONS

- **Scenario Twisting-** Changing details from a past memory to evaluate their change on current or future events.
- **Mental Review-** Replaying and securitizing a past event for potential wrong, inappropriate, or harmful actions to find certainty of “right” actions.
- **Rumination-** Thinking, considering, and problem solving without resolution or action.
- **Self- Reassurance-** Reminding yourself of a current belief or fact, or effortfully thinking something to ensure confidence,
 - safety, or certainty.
- **Self Punishment-** Criticism, self directed harm, or withholding of positive things in order to cosmically atone for perceived failings or mistakes.

FALSE MEMORY OCD

- OCD subtype that focuses on whether a memory is genuine or whether it was falsely created
- Common within RE-OCD
- Can occur at the same time as RE-OCD and lead to exaggeration of symptoms
- False memories can be created through repeated story telling and suggestion



CANCEL CULTURE

“The practice of withdrawing support for individuals or organizations after they have been accused of objectionable behavior”

Pros

- Provides feedback regarding the moral approval of various behaviors
- Gives an example of culturally unwanted behavior and a benchmark for unacceptable behaviors
- Can promote personal self reflection and engender a desire to take ownership of past mistakes and commit to self improvement

Cons

- Repercussions are often widespread and extreme
- Often does not account for context
- Typically does not allow for atonement or repair
- Causes undue anxiety
- Reinforces avoidance and disengagement
- Disincentivizes risk

CANCEL CULTURE FROM THE RIGHT AND LEFT

■ **Left Cancellations**

- J.K. Rowling
- Donald Trump
- Joe Rogan
- Kevin Heart

■ **Right Cancellations**

- Colin Kaepernick/ NFL
- Bud Light
- The Dixie Chicks
- Disney

TO ERR IS HUMAN

- REAL GUILT- The bad feeling based on a known action that violates a rule or personal value
 - Ex- physically hurting a friend, cheating on a test, etc.
- Redirects you back to ego-syntonic/ valued baseline behavior and way of being.
- FALSE GUILT- a bad feeling despite no evidence of wrong behavior, or continued guilt despite taking appropriate atonement steps.
 - Ex- knowingly cheating on a test, confessed and received punishment, but continue to feel bad
 - Ex- bad feelings about cheating on a test without any evidence, knowledge, or intention of cheating on a test
- Serves no purpose

PAST GUILT/ CURRENT GUILT

Past Guilt

- Few clear details
- Chances of false or distorted memory
- No control
- Contextual cues are lost
- Amount of time can amplify “what ifs”
- Usually a gap between event and start of guilt

Current Guilt

- More context to events, decisions, and actions
- Greater possibility to act and make atonement
- Clearer memory of event
- Reduced chances of distortions
- Guilt in closer proximity to events



CORE FEAR AND VULNERABILITY

- Person who struggles with being the best possible person, not just being a good person who makes mistakes. Someone who struggles with the black and white of their character
- Vulnerable Self Theme
 - Feared version of who we could become if we don't do compulsions



COMMON VULNERABLE SELF THEMES

- Being someone that is negligent/ careless
 - Being prone to illness
 - Somebody that could cause harm
 - Being embarrassed
 - Losing control
 - Somebody that has a negative agenda
 - Having an unending feeling
 - Being inevitably doomed
- Example: Someone who could cause harm
 - “But I did cause harm that one time” therefore I need to be hypervigilant and perfectly careful in order to prevent harm.
 - Example: Losing control
 - Afraid of flights, roller coasters, being in public because I could act out of character like I did that one time.

RE-OCD TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

- Take responsibility for *known* harms/wrongs
- Responsibility IS:
 - Being accountable for one's actions
 - Self-empowering
 - Different from person-to-person
- Taking responsibility is NOT:
 - Owning up to things we *might* have done.
 - Apologizing only
 - Self-blame, punishment, or keeping ourselves on "The Hook"
 - A means to dispel guilt
- Obstacles to taking responsibility:
 - Figuring out the "Right" thing to do
 - Worry about consequences or focusing on exaggerated examples of consequences or cancellation
 - Taking responsibility means I'm a bad person because I've done a bad thing
 - "This is how I learn/what I deserve"

RE-OCD TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

- Making Amends
 - Borrowing from the 12-steps of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA).

Step 8- Identified people we have harmed.

Step 9- Make direct amends when possible unless it would cause more injury or harm

Direct Amends:

- Places importance on the other person.
- Making contact to acknowledge the harm done
- Amends- showing that you are doing things differently and asking if repair can be made
- Apology- just words of acknowledgement, but may not demonstrate that you are living in alignment with new and improved values

Living Amends:

- If direct amends is not possible
- Can donate time, money, or other action.
- Make expressed and concerted effort to lifelong behavioral change

CHALLENGING THE IRRATIONAL STORY BEHIND RE-OCD

- Cognitive Distortions/ Faulty Thinking
 - All/ nothing thinking
 - Tunnel vision
 - Perfectionism
 - Should/ must
 - Emotional reasoning
 - Overgeneralization
 - Underestimating coping ability
 - Inferential confusion
- “Challenging” Thoughts
 - Meta-info/Defusion
 - Mostly Good/Good enough
 - Gun Test
 - Court Scenario
 - Moral Thought Experiment
 - Alternative story

CHALLENGING THE IRRATIONAL STORY BEHIND RE-OCD

- Facts- things that we know are true
- Rules- actions we are supposed to follow
- Hearsay- other people's stories/experience
- Personal experience- What you've actually experienced
- Possibility- Anything we could imagine
- Context is key!

EXPOSURE AND RESPONSE PREVENTION

Exposure and Response Prevention- Progressively getting closer and closer to your fear without doing anything that would reduce, eliminate, neutralize, or avoid the anxiety.

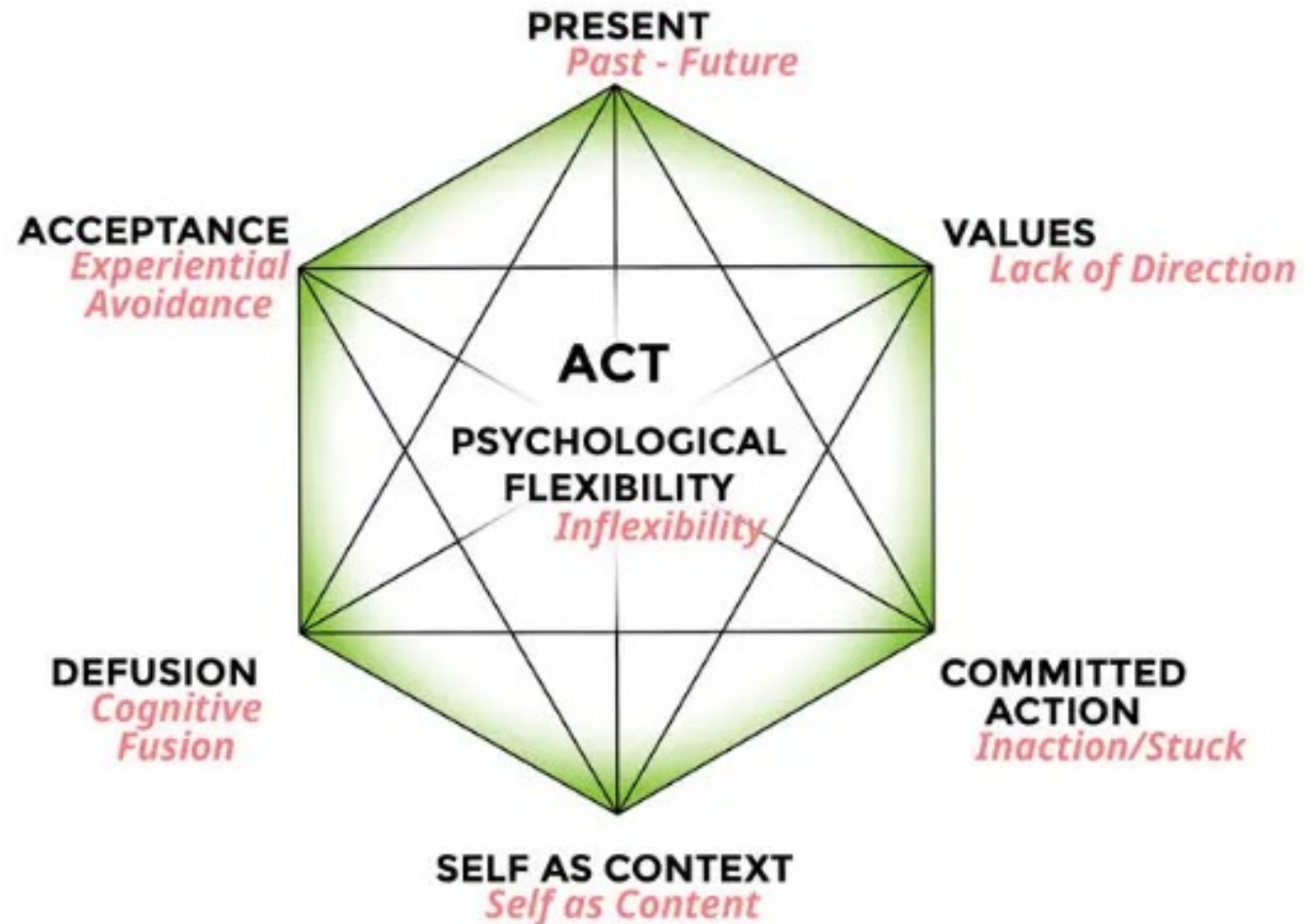
Exposure

- In –Vivo Exposures
 - Going to place(s) of event
 - Watching triggering media
- Scripting
 - Stories about unwanted outcome actually happening (be sensitive to shame/guilt)
- Living Life
 - Passive exposure

Response Prevention

- Allowing for feelings/ thoughts, resist reassurance/ neutralization
- Identify urges, feelings, physical sensations while resisting changing/ suppressing the discomfort
- Exercise compassion and forgiveness, wait to get caught, practice “maybe”
- Disengage from rumination

ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT FOR RE-OCD



CASE EXAMPLES

- Case #1:
- A 45 year old cis hetero male. Acted sexually inappropriate with a woman in his early 20s while under the influence of alcohol. He has been thinking about it “all the time” for the past 6 months. He feels it was triggered after reading about the Me Too movement. He feels horrible and like he doesn’t deserve anything good in his life. He often punishes himself by avoiding pleasurable experiences. He has and continues to speak to friends, search internet forums, and thoroughly reflect on his past as a means to bring clarity to the situation.

CASE EXAMPLES

- Case #2
- A 27 year old cis gay woman has vague “memories” of sexual experiences with her mom when she was a young child. She isn’t sure if these events actually occurred as the memories are “fuzzy.” She wants to ask her mom about it but is terrified. She’s searches Reddit for relevant posts and talks to her friends about it every once in a while. She feels if she could find out whether or not these events happened that then she could take the necessary next steps.

CASE EXAMPLES

- Case #3
- A 32 year old nonbinary lawyer recalls cheating on a test during undergraduate studies. This realization seemed to “come out of nowhere.” They feel like their current success is all based on a lie. They’ve been considering speaking with The State Bar of California and their college administrative office.

WORKS CITED

- <https://staff.washington.edu/eloftus/Articles/sciam.htm#:~:text=False%20memories%20are%20constructed%20by,and%20the%20source%20become%20dissociated.>
- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3183109/>

THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING

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