



Examining Obsession and Compulsion

Introduction: The following information and activity is about obsessive thinking and compulsive behavior from a general viewpoint. **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)** can be a more serious concern that may often require more advanced psychiatric assistance depending on the degree to which it affects one's functioning

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder: OCD - A psychiatric disorder characterized by the persistent intrusion of repetitive, unwanted thoughts which may be accompanied by compulsive actions, such as handwashing. The individual cannot voluntarily prevent these thoughts or actions, which interfere with *normal functioning. (dictionary.com)

*If you believe you may have OCD and it is affecting your functioning, it would be a good idea to see a psychiatrist if you haven't

What is Obsession?

Obsession is: "The domination of one's thoughts or feelings by a persistent idea, image, desire, etc." (all definitions on this worksheet taken from dictionary.com). People can be obsessed with just about anything including:

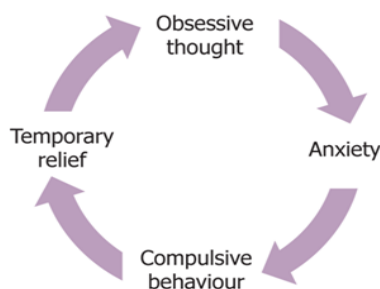
- **People** – relationship partners, ex-relationship partners, someone you may want to be in a relationship with, famous people, sports stars, coworkers, neighbors, family, friends, etc.
- **Beliefs** – Political, religious, superstitious, economical, philosophical, conspiracy-theories, etc.
- **Entertainment** – Music, movies, TV shows, internet, sports, social media etc.
- **Pleasure Seeking** – Sex, pornography, drugs, alcohol, gambling, thrill-seeking, risk-taking
- **Hobbies** – Fishing, biking, gaming, etc.
- **Things/Merchandise** – Cars, technology, clothes, fashion, collecting things, etc.
- **Health** – Exercise, diet, nutrition, "remedies"
- **Rituals, Numbers, Routines, "Order"**: Checking, counting, hoarding, etc. (These are usually associated with actual **OCD**)
- **Other** – Money, gossip, texting, etc.

Discussion – Have you ever had (or do you currently think you may have) an obsession with any of the above areas? If so, share it with the group if you are willing to

What is Compulsion?

Obsession is all about thoughts and compulsion involves the behaviors associated with obsessive thoughts.

- **Compulsion:** a strong, usually irresistible impulse to perform an act
- **Examples:**
 - Obsessing about gambling with the corresponding compulsion being going to the race track
 - Obsessing about sex and then compulsively dating and going to clubs to meet new people
 - Obsessing about gossip and then spending inordinate amounts of time on the phone, social media and the internet looking into other people's lives (Facebook stalking)





What is the difference between an interest, concern, or pastime and an *obsession/compulsion*?

- **Preoccupation:** (**Preoccupy** – to absorb or engross to the inclusion of other things) – Signs that you may be preoccupied with someone or something:
 - Thinking about something at a time when you really should be concentrating on something else more important (For example thinking about _____ (Fill in the blank with object of obsession) when you are at work, school, etc.
 - “All Roads Lead to _____” Every conversation seems to somehow devolve into a discussion about the object of your obsession. Everyone knows someone like this: The person who always somehow ends up talking about their relationship. You can see this on social media when the comments on a seemingly innocent subject can quickly break down into a heated political debate that had little or nothing to do with the intent of the original post
 - Disproportionate Allocation of Resources: Increasing amounts of time and money used directly or indirectly for the object of the obsession. For example, someone who goes into debt to pay for their enormous shoe collection or someone who spends almost every free minute they have playing video games or doing another obsessive activity. Often other activities that do not involve or get in the way of the obsession get reduced.
 - Extreme Difficulty Abstaining from Obsession – The inability to go without the object of obsession for any significant time period. For example, the person who has to constantly check or update social media all day long
- **Loss of control/Life Impairment** – The object of the obsession starts to get in the way of living up to your potential
 - Family and/or friends complaining
 - Having to sneak or lie about the obsession
 - Feeling guilty/Regrets
 - Thinking about quitting or cutting back
 - Debt/Money Problems
 - Neglect of Responsibilities
 - Failed attempts to quit/ cut back
 - Consequences (Losing a job or losing friends due to the obsession, for example or getting arrested or getting a restraining order due to stalking would be another extreme example)

Discussion: Go through the above checklists. Did anything stand out for you? – Explain

Then consider: How does **ADDICTION involve **OBSESSION** and **COMPULSION**?**

Can an obsession be positive?

- Obviously some obsessions can be more harmful or damaging than others.
- Becoming obsessed with something positive that makes you a better person is obviously better than an obsession with something time-wasting or harmful. Still, even with something that seems positive, it is important to:
 - Maintain healthy balance and harmony in life
 - Maintain priorities and responsibilities
 - Sustain healthy relationships and care for those under our supervision (e.g. children)
 - Be flexible and adaptable as things in life change

Therefore even something that on the outside seems positive can still be problematic if it becomes an obsession that is difficult to control or maintain. For example, exercise is beneficial, but how could an **unhealthy obsession** with exercise be problematic?



Coping with Obsessive and Compulsion

Unfortunately, when it comes to coping with and overcoming *obsession* and *compulsion* there are no quick fixes and no easy answers. Obsession and compulsion are all about *thinking* and *behavior*. Therefore most coping strategies for these issues boil down to learning to take negative thoughts and behaviors that sustain obsession and compulsion and transform them into new, positive thoughts and behaviors to take their place.

A great place to start is to come up with a catch phrase associated with imagery that can work for you mentally as a reminder to break your old pattern of obsessive thinking and compulsive behaviors

Activity: The sample phrases below all are in some way about stopping obsessive thoughts and then substituting them with positive, coping thoughts and behaviors. Choose a coping phrase below that you think could be helpful for you. Then draw an image that you can use as a picture in your mind to help you remember that thought. (Don't worry if you are not good at drawing, do the best you can. This is about coming up with an effective coping strategy, not an art contest)

Sample Coping Phrases:

CHANGE THE CHANNEL

GET THE RAT OFF OF THE
WHEEL

STOP FEEDING THE OBSESSION

LEARN TO "BE IN THE MOMENT"

BREAK FREE FROM
ENSLAVEMENT

DISENGAGE AND CONQUER

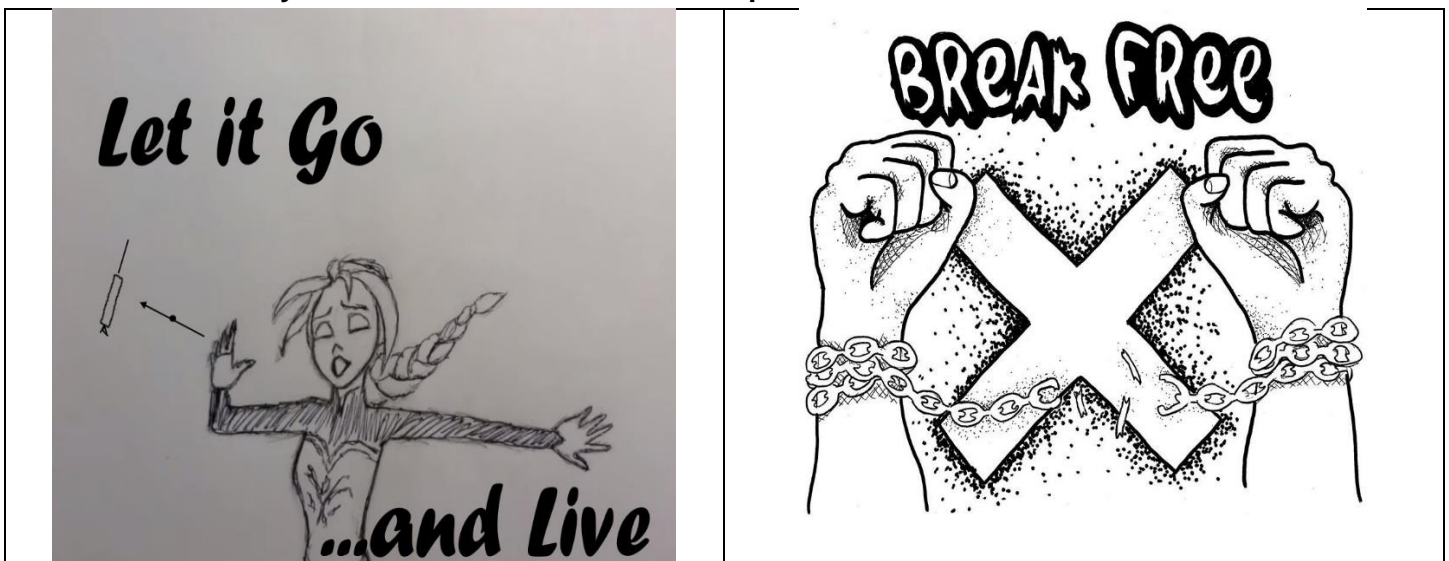
LET GO AND LIVE

DISTRACT, DETACH AND MOVE
ON

SEPARATE YOURSELF FROM
THE INSANITY

...Or come up with your own phrase: _____

Finally, when ready, on a blank piece of paper, rewrite your coping phrase and draw a picture of the image you will think of when you are practicing breaking the pattern of obsessive thinking. Then review and discuss your work with others. Some sample ideas below:





SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION ABOUT OCD

The previous information was generalized for people to discuss and consider obsessive and compulsive issues. However, if you know or suspect that you have actual, diagnosable Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, consider the following:

OCD is a specific anxiety disorder characterized by:

- Repetitive unwanted thoughts and/or mental images that can be extremely difficult to control
- Repetitive ritualistic behaviors that also are difficult to control, including some common ones:
 - Washing/Cleaning – This can apply to one’s body or one’s home or both
 - Checking (For example always checking to make sure the oven is really off)
 - Counting – Feeling a need to count things or do things a specific amount of times first
 - Hoarding – Inability to throw things away due to fear you may need them later
 - Arranging – Always putting things in a specific arrangement or order
 - Intrusive Fears – Obsessing over things like accidentally hurting someone else or fear of germs
- These obsessions and compulsions cause significant stress and anxiety and limit overall functioning
- OCD can accompany other types of anxiety disorders as well

If you believe you may have OCD it would be a good idea to consider seeking outside assistance. OCD can be treated and improved with therapy and medication, or in some cases both. OCD can start in childhood and in many cases you cannot expect it to just go away on its own. So if OCD is affecting your life it is worth it to get a professional opinion or two.