

Doing Differently

Doing the compulsion in response to our thoughts serves to keep the OCD anxiety going because we never learn that NOT doing it wouldn't result in the feared consequence. Not doing the rituals or checking is therefore going to provoke anxiety initially, but we can use our coping strategies to tolerate that discomfort, and we will learn that just because we had a thought, we don't have to do the compulsion and the feared event does not happen.

Doing Differently: Exposure & Response Prevention

Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP) is the type of behavioural therapy for OCD. It simply means being exposed to the thought or situation that makes you feel anxious, and NOT responding to it by doing the compulsion.

- The easiest way to start is to keep a diary of your rituals / compulsions for one week using the **OC Rituals Diary**.
- After identifying what you do (when, how long for etc) you can list them all using the **Hierarchy of Feared Situations** and rate them according to how distressing each one is or would be if you couldn't do what you feel compelled to do.
- Then start with the situation or compulsion that is the LEAST distressing. You will need to decide what is achievable for the first week - to stop doing it altogether, to restrict how many times or for how long you do it, or to delay doing it for a certain period of time. If you decide to delay, then you can use this sheet: **Delay, Distract, Decide**
- Decide what you will aim to do for one week, and practise that one thing all week, several times a day or however many times it comes up. Keep track with this **ERP Practice Record**
- Gradually, as you overcome each compulsion, you can start to move up the hierarchy, moving onto a more difficult/distressing item each time until you have overcome the most distressing one.

As you practise these techniques, you are still going to feel the anxiety and physical discomfort that goes with it when you don't immediately respond to the thought by doing the compulsion. However, you can practise strategies to help you cope with this discomfort:

- **STOPP**
- **Fact or Opinion?**
- **Mindful Breathing**
- **Distraction**
- **Positive Coping Statements**
- **Colour Breathing**
- **Defusion Exercises**
- **Soothe or Emergency Bag / Box**
- **Relaxation**
- **Reminder Cards: 8 cards of various skills**
- **Safe Place Imagery**
- **Imagery Self Help**
- **Using Music Therapeutically**

Each time you do NOT do the compulsion, your mind finds out that the thing you feared happening, didn't happen, which will help you to challenge that same thought when it happens again. It takes a while for that information to sink in, but eventually your mind realises you just don't need to believe or take notice of these thoughts any more - so they lose their power over you. The thoughts may not stop happening, but **you don't have to believe everything you think!**