

Mental Compulsions

Mental compulsions are anything you do internally to reduce, neutralize, or eradicate your distress associated with your OCD obsessions and intrusive thoughts.

Just like physical compulsions- whether something is compulsive or not will always come down to one thing: INTENTION.

Is your intention to count to be able to know how many things you have? Or to drown out intrusive thoughts?

Is your intention to review something that happened so you can make appropriate apologies?
Or is it to "fix" something and get rid of your distress?

Is your intention to pray to connect with higher power?
Or to pray to get rid of your distress?

Typically, compulsions feel more urgent and specific. You might find it harder to delay or walk away from the behavior. There is a lot of trial and error as you figure it out- be patient with yourself! These behaviors don't change overnight.

The goal here is not to stop thinking altogether. For instance, there are times when counting in your head is effective and times when it might be compulsive. Maybe those even occur in the same day or same hour! So how do we well the difference? It all comes down to intention.

Common Compulsions

Here are 3 categories of mental compulsions! (not a comprehensive list!)

- **Mental review, rumination..**
 - Replaying an event, memory, or past conversation to find a sense of certainty about what it means
 - Reviewing future conversations, events or hypotheticals to find a sense of certainty about what it means.
 - Revisiting thoughts, feelings, or sensations to see if they are still present and/or distressing

Notice the prefix "re" here! It implies that this is cyclical. No matter how many times we return to it, there is always more certainty to be gained. Because life will always have uncertainties!

- **Thought neutralizing, blocking, distracting**
 - Sometimes rather than trying to figure out the thoughts, we just try to avoid them completely!
 - This might come as chanting, repeating, "cancelling", or replacing with a positive thought or emotion.
- **Self-reassurance**
 - May ritualize positive affirmations, comforting statements, prayer or other religious forms of assurance.
 - May review of previously acquired reassurance (by friends, family, therapists, religious leaders...)

What mental compulsions do you recognize showing up?

What are the thoughts, feelings, or uncertainties that you are trying to avoid by engaging in these?

How can you work to choose long term relief over short term certainty next time you catch yourself in these compulsions?
