**What to do when plagued with OCD Thoughts?**

**Many people are caught in an OCD cycle where their coping is to use thinking (obsessing or researching more), rather than to do a behavior that we more typically associate with OCD like hand-washing, cleaning, checking, etc… Below is an action plan to follow when you are caught in this unproductive cycle of coping with obsessive thought. Follow the 4 steps below whenever you are having obsessive thought, anxiety or the uncomfortable feeling of uncertainty – and you are caught in a cycle of trying to feel better by obsessively thinking and researching.**

**The core of OCD is trying to get rid of uncertainty in your life in attempt to be 100% certain. Often you are obsessing because your mind and body hate sitting with uncertainty and doubt about the future. Therefore you will research and think to try and get more certainty. But this is a loosing battle, because the nature of life is that many things are uncertain. We think we know where we will be at 6pm tomorrow night, but you can never know about the future for sure. And this is OK. You can still have a good life and be safe even when decisions don’t turned out as planned and you make mistakes.**

**The main treatment for OCD is “Exposure” and “Response Prevention.”**

**Exposure =** Exposure yourself to the feelings of uncertainty, doubt and anxiety (and the situations that cause these feelings)

**Response Prevention =** When anxious, prevent yourself from coping by thinking

**Response Prevention Steps:**

1. **Recognize OCD Thoughts:** 
   1. Recognize & allow the intrusive obsessive thoughts and urges that arise in you.
   2. Acknowledge and lovingly accept that these are OCD thoughts. They are arising because of biochemical imbalances in the brain. They are not rational and you cannot trust the content and associated feelings.
   3. Label which thinking errors are represented by your thoughts: Overestimated threat, Inflated responsibility, Over-importance of thought, Control of thoughts, Intolerance of uncertainty, Perfectionism, Intolerance of anxiety/distress
2. **Refocus:** Prevent yourself from ‘coping’ with feelings of uncertainty & anxiety by taking a stance that you want to retrain your brain to not use these thought coping strategies (obsessing, worrying, researching, trying to figure it out, blaming yourself, asking for reassurance, looking online…). Every time you obsess, worry or research to cope, you strengthen the obsession neural pathway. Every time you shift your attention off of obsessive thinking, you strengthen healthier neural pathways. You retrain your brain.
   1. When obsessing about something, you can ask yourself: “If this thought came true, why would this be so bad?” Sometimes in OCD, you stay fixated on a surface level concern and you are not in touch with the underlying fear. Bring the underlying fear to light, and ask yourself “What could I really do if this worst case scenario happened? And “How likely is this worst case scenario?”
   2. Gun-test: The next time you are obsessing about a decision, think of the following scenario. Imagine I have a gun pointed at you and your loved ones, and I am going to give you a single guess about your concern (for example, Do you have this disease right now? Should you have made that decision the way you did?). You will only have one guess, and if you guess wrong, you and they will be killed. You don’t have to be confident in your guess, but you do have to guess because you do have to guess and if you don’t guess, everyone will be killed. (J. Grayson)
   3. Work around the OCD thoughts by focusing your attention on something else, at least for a few minutes. Engross your attention in: 1) a valued action (work, connecting with a family member or friend, exercising, gratitude exercise, cooking…), 2) the present moment (get all of your attention on your senses and off of thought with the 5x5x5, counting the breath, listening to music intently, 3) generate feelings of warmth, care and tenderness for yourself in the midst of being plagued with obsessive thoughts, and 4) distract yourself (watch TV, play a video game, go to sleep).

**Exposure Steps:**

1. **Accept:** You need to learn to live with uncertainty and get your body to get more comfortable with these feelings. Therefore, when feeling these, put your attention on the sensations, tingling, pressure, warmth in your chest, belly, neck, head or shoulders (wherever you are feeling the sensations of anxiety and uncertainty). Allow the sensations to be exactly as they are. Shift all of your attention to the raw sensation and off of thought. When you're in uncertainty land, hang out in the sensations of anxiety while not answering the questions in your head.
2. **Seek Out:** You want to make yourself uncertain and anxious. So actively approach uncertainty and celebrate when you stumble upon it - this is an opportunity to practice and reduce how much you become trapped by OCD.

**THE MORE MOMENTS IN A DAY YOU DO “EXPOSURE” AND “RESPONSE PREVENTION” THE MORE YOU ARE GROOVING NEW NEURAL NETWORK AND WEAKENING THE OCD ENTRAPMENT.**

**SUMMARY OF 4 STEPS:**

**Recognize:** OCD Thought = “I might have chosen the wrong thing.” Accept: This repetitive thought coming up for the 1000th time is a biochemical imbalance in my brain.

Label: Overestimated threat, Over-importance of thought, Perfectionism, Intolerance of anxiety/distress

**Refocus:** Why would this be so bad? What practical action steps would I take to live with the worst case scenario if it happened? Do the Gun-Test. Shift your attention to a valued action, present moment, self-compassion or distraction.

**Accept:** Do acceptance of sensation exercises within they body on feelings of uncertainty while not answering the questions in your mind.

**Seek Out:** Lean into situations of uncertainty. Actively seek out situations where you doubt and feel unsure. Do not avoid and make your life smaller.