

List of Thinking Errors and EXAMPLES

Type	Example
Overestimated threat: Having the obsession leads you to judge situations to be much more potentially harmful than they really are.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “If I shake a stranger’s hand, I will likely contract AIDS.” • “If I leave the door unlocked, someone will break in.” • “If I throw this away, I’ll seriously regret it one day.”
Thought-action fusion (TAF) Increased likelihood TAF: Thinking about a negative event increases the likelihood that the event will happen.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “If I think about my son having an accident, then it is more likely to happen.” • “Now that I’ve thought of the plane crashing, it will happen.”
Moral TAF: Having a ‘bad’ thought is as immoral as acting on that thought.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Having a violent thought is the moral equivalent of doing something violent.” • “Having a forbidden sexual thought is almost as bad as doing it.”
Inflated responsibility: Holding yourself responsible for preventing harmful things from happening to yourself or others. Believing you have the ability to prevent negative outcomes. Because you think about the possibility of something harmful happening, you are primarily responsible for preventing it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Now that I’ve thought about the possibility of the broken glass on the road causing an accident, it is my responsibility to do everything I can to prevent the accident.” • “I must make sure I don’t contaminate other people.” • “I must protect my family by finishing this task in the next hour and repeating what I’m doing the right number of times.”
Over-importance of thought: Obsessions must be very important in some way, and may signify some undesirable inner motive or potential.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “My aggressive thoughts about other people mean that deep down I may actually want to harm them and am a horrible person.” • “Because I continually worry about doing things right or wrong, this means I am prone to mistakes and should be careful.”
Control of thoughts: It is possible and necessary to exert strong control over the obsessions. If the obsession is not controlled, there will be undesirable consequences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “If I don’t control these thoughts, I will impulsively act on them.” • “If I don’t control these thoughts, I will go crazy with anxiety.” • “I should never have a bad thought against God or other people.” • “I have to get to the point where I can control my thoughts.”
Intolerance of uncertainty: The belief that you must achieve absolute certainty in thought and/or action in order to reduce doubt, ambiguity, and the possibility of negative outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “If I feel a doubt about a decision, I must go over and over it until I am convinced I made the right decision.” • “I need 100% proof that I am not a pedophile.” • “I must be absolutely sure I didn’t run over someone.”
Perfectionism: The belief that you must strive to achieve a perfect response to every problem or situation. Even minor mistakes must be avoided because they can lead to serious consequences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “It is important that I write the ‘perfect’ thing in this email.” • “I must make the correct decision now or something bad will happen.”
Intolerance of anxiety/distress: If anxiety or distress is not reduced or eliminated, it will lead to harmful consequences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “When I have anxiety I need to act immediately to get rid of it.” • “If I don’t get rid of this anxiety, I won’t be able to function”

Note: from Clark (2004). *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for OCD*. New York: Guilford Press.

List of Thinking Errors of Obsessions and CHALLENGES

Type	Challenge
Overestimated threat: Having the obsession leads to you judge situations to be much more potentially harmful than they really are.	Situations are safe unless there is external, real-life evidence of actual threat or danger. Having thoughts or feelings about the possibility of harm or danger does not mean that real life danger is more likely.
Thought-action fusion (TAF) Increased likelihood TAF: Thinking about a negative event increases the likelihood that the event will happen.	My thoughts cannot directly cause things to happen in the real world.
Moral TAF: Having a ‘bad’ thought is as immoral as acting on that thought.	My behavior is what’s important. Moral character has nothing to do with thoughts.
Inflated responsibility: Holding yourself responsible for preventing harmful things from happening to yourself or others. Believing you have the ability to prevent negative outcomes. Because you think about the possibility of something harmful happening, you are primarily responsible for preventing it.	All real-life events involve multiple factors that cause them to happen. As a result, responsibility is distributed across many contributing factors, with a person’s own contribution to the event often playing a very minor or insignificant role. As a result of this, my responsibility and ability to prevent the event is often minimal, if not nonexistent.
Over-importance of thought: Obsessions must be very important in some way, and may signify some undesirable inner motive or potential.	Persistent obsessions involve themes that are contrary to my cherished values and inclinations. When I dwell on it or give it undue attention, I raise its perceived importance and frequency. My mind produces many thoughts, many of which are completely insignificant.
Control of thoughts: It is possible and necessary to exert strong control over the obsessions. If the obsession is not controlled, there will be undesirable consequences.	Great effort at controlling unwanted thoughts will cause an increase in the frequency, salience and associated distress. By just letting them be, I will ultimately devote less attention to the thought and the importance and frequency of the thought will decrease.
Intolerance of uncertainty: The belief that you must achieve absolute certainty in thought and/or action in order to reduce doubt, ambiguity, and the possibility of negative outcomes.	Uncertainty is an unavoidable aspect of human experience and can never be eliminated. It is the striving for certainty (rather than uncertainty itself) that makes my anxiety worse and makes things seem more dangerous.
Perfectionism: The belief that you must strive to achieve a perfect response to every problem or situation. Even minor mistakes must be avoided because they can lead to serious consequences.	Minor mistakes or inaccuracies are an inevitable aspect of all human endeavors and do not result in serious negative consequences. It is the striving for perfection that causes anxiety and distress. The alternative is my best performance that meets the requirements of the situation.
Intolerance of anxiety/distress: If anxiety or distress is not reduced or eliminated, it will lead to harmful consequences.	Anxiety and fear are natural human emotions that are a vital part of being alive. I can adapt to varying levels of short-term anxiety without harmful long-term consequences. Avoiding anxiety is just not effective and leads to more anxiety in the long run.

Note: from Clark (2004). *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for OCD*. New York: Guilford Press.

List of Thinking Errors and MORE CHALLENGING TECHNIQUES

Type	More Challenging Techniques
Overestimated threat: Having the obsession leads to you judge situations to be much more potentially harmful than they really are.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Downward arrow technique: Continually ask yourself the question “What is so bad about that?” until you reach your ‘core’ fear. 2) Get information from an expert. (If this is not your tendency.)
Thought-action fusion (TAF) Increased likelihood TAF: Thinking about a negative event increases the likelihood that the event will happen.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Write down a specific and detailed account of how your thought might cause something negative to happen. 2) Gather any evidence for and against the belief that your thoughts do or don’t cause things to happen.
Moral TAF: Having a ‘bad’ thought is as immoral as acting on that thought.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Continuum technique. Rate yourself on a continuum of immorality (or evilness etc.) from 0-100. Then fill in where other people would fit on this continuum. Move your rating as needed to fit the other people in. 2) List examples of incidents that are revealing about the type of person you are and how connected these incidents are with your thoughts. 3) Normalize. Review “Obsessions Reported by Nonclinical Samples” handout.
Inflated responsibility: Holding yourself responsible for preventing harmful things from happening to yourself or others. Believing you have the ability to prevent negative outcomes. Because you think about the possibility of something harmful happening, you are primarily responsible for preventing it.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Compassionate humor: Imagine a courtroom scene in which you are being prosecuted for your feared consequence. You play the role of the defense attorney. 2) Make a pie chart of all the factors that would contribute to your feared consequence happening. Add yourself to the chart last.
Over-importance of thought: Obsessions must be very important in some way, and may signify some undesirable inner motive or potential.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Normalize. Review “Obsessions Reported by Nonclinical Samples” handout. Interview trusted friends and families about their intrusive thoughts. (If this is not your tendency.) 2) Monitor your thoughts and rate their importance. Are the ones that occur most frequently more important than others?
Control of thoughts: It is possible and necessary to exert strong control over the obsessions. If the obsession is not controlled, there will be undesirable consequences.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Pink elephant technique to demonstrate the futility trying to strongly control thoughts. 2) Gather any evidence for and against the belief that you will impulsively act on uncontrolled thoughts.
Intolerance of uncertainty: The belief that you must achieve absolute certainty in thought and/or action in order to reduce doubt, ambiguity, and the possibility of negative outcomes.	Pros and Cons. List pros and cons of striving for certainty. Think of past examples of when you felt certain of a decision and examples of when you had to tolerate uncertainty. What were the consequences? What effort was involved? Was it worth it?
Perfectionism: The belief that you must strive to achieve a perfect response to every problem or situation. Even minor mistakes must be avoided because they can lead to serious consequences.	Pros and Cons. List pros and cons of striving for perfection. Think of past examples of when you felt you acted perfectly and examples of when you had to tolerate imperfection. What were the consequences? What effort was involved? Was it worth it?
Intolerance of anxiety/distress: If anxiety or distress is not reduced or eliminated, it will lead to harmful consequences.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Downward arrow technique: Continually ask yourself the question “What is so bad about that?” until you reach your ‘core’ fear. 2) Think back to non-OCD events that cause you great anxiety. How did things go?

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List of Thinking Errors and MORE CHALLENGING TECHNIQUES