

## Creating a plan for overcoming your OCD

Your plan to overcome your OCD must relate directly to your own obsessions, compulsions and avoidance behaviours. To create the most effective plan you will need to examine your OCD. Being aware of how and when your intrusive thoughts occur is a significant part of your plan; it will help you to seek opportunities, deliberately and you, repeatedly, to practice new responses to intrusive thoughts, as well as break unhelpful habits.

Below we set out a basic template you can follow to help examine your OCD. Later chapters of this book cover each of the following stages:

**Identify** your obsessions; include your intrusive thoughts, images, fears, impulses and doubts as well as the way you respond with your compulsions and safety seeking behaviours.

**Define** the situations, people, objects or activities that you try to avoid because of your fears or obsessions. Later this will help you deliberately face your fears and/or triggers for your unwanted thoughts.

**Set** personal goals for overcoming your OCD. The most important question to answer is: 'How do you want things to be different?'

**Consider** the meaning you have attached to intrusions that cause you distress and make you react in ways that are unhelpful. These can range from the general (emotional reasoning: 'if I feel anxious then there must be a danger') to the specific (moral fusion: 'if I think I could push someone on the underground, then I am bad'). We refer to this as Theory A and will expand on it later in this book.

**Reflect** on aspects of your thinking style that might contribute to the maintenance of your OCD. People with OCD tend to assume significantly more responsibility than the average person for causing or preventing harm. If this is the case with you, recognise that if the thought of disaster has occurred to you, you don't have to take responsibility for preventing it from happening. Letting thoughts of catastrophe pass without checking or taking precautions is normal, not irresponsible.

**Concentrate** on when you carry your compulsions or use avoidance. If you just do them automatically, without becoming more aware, it can be difficult to choose to stop. Technically this is called Response Prevention. Using a tally counter to record the frequency of a compulsion can greatly improve your awareness and give you an effective measurement of change.

**Understand** how your solutions to avoid your intrusive thoughts and urges are your problem. We model this as a 'vicious flower' and later in the book we will help you create your own vicious flower. When you do this, you should be able to see how doing more or less of these solutions affects the frequency, intensity and duration of your obsessions. Your ultimate aim is to allow unwanted mental events, emotions, or bodily sensations to pass

without 'engaging' with them. Often this means learning to trust aspects of yourself you currently distrust: your morality, your memory, your judgement and so on.

**Develop** an alternative explanation for your intrusive thoughts. Instead of thinking 'I have thoughts about being a paedophile, therefore I must be one', the alternative explanation is 'I have thoughts about being a paedophile. Having so many intrusive images shows how much I don't want to harm a child'. In CBT this is often referred to as 'Theory B'. The key to Theory B is to re-interpret unwanted mental events as normal. No one has control over the unwanted thoughts that pop into their head. Those thoughts often reflect something that we don't want to do.

**Act 'as if'** you believe Theory B to identify the explanation which most closely fits the facts. You may not be 100 per cent sure of this but demanding certainty shows that your mind is sticking to 'better safe than sorry' mode which is likely to block you from recovery. Observing how your problem responds to being treated 'as if' Theory B is correct will provide compelling evidence that your intrusive thoughts are simply a product of concern or worry and nothing more meaningful.

**Confront** the things you have been avoiding by resisting compulsions, neutralising and reassurance seeking. This is covered when we explain the principles of exposure.

**Identify** the ways in which you and/or others may have accommodated your OCD. Develop a plan to build a life that is free from any accommodation. This may have to involve re-educating others who have adapted to your OCD.

Adapted from : 'Overcoming Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, 1st and 2nd Edition: A self-help guide using cognitive behavioural techniques' (Overcoming Books) by [David Veale](#) (Author), [Rob Willson](#) (Author)