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Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP)

When experiencing Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) one option for treating symptoms includes ERP. It includes systematically exposing oneself to anxiety provoking events and then reducing safety behaviors, rituals and compulsions that are normally done before, during and after these events. The goal of this treatment isn't to get rid of the intrusive thoughts, but to no longer let them dictate your life.

Reduce → Postpone → Resist → Undo

Using this strategies has benefits such as:

- Becoming more aware of OCD triggers
- Building tolerance for anxiety
- Learning you can tolerate difficult emotions
- Becoming more realistic about "threats"
- Beginning to lower anxiety/OCD symptoms
- Reducing depression
- Living life more driven by your values instead of fears

When starting this know that:

- Behavior change must come first
- Exposures should be difficult, but also be manageable
- You will have to resist your rituals (studies say this is the most important part)
- Continue to practice this outside sessions
- You will be able to do it on your own one day

Strengths & Values to engage with:

- Commitment to the practice of exposure and prevention treatment
 - Courage to be scared and doing it anyways
 - Faith in trusting the process even when scared
 - Patience to know that sustainable change will take time, but is worth it.
 - What other strengths and values do you believe will be important?
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To practice ERP start by:

1. Identifying your triggers

- a. Keep a log by phone or paper for when you feel triggered.
- b. Answer in the moment or when you can:
 - What was the situation?
 - What ritual(s) behavioral or mental, did you feel compelled to do?
 - What was your anxiety like?
 - What thoughts were you having?

2. Identify all of your rituals and safety behaviors

- a. Write down or log all the ways you cope with the anxiety as it relates to your obsession or compulsion.
 - It may be avoiding or if you endure it what mental or behavioral actions allow you to get through.
- b. What do you do before, during, and after?
- c. If you are unsure if something could be a ritual ask yourself “what is the function of that behavior?”
 - Does it relate to reducing your anxiety as it relates to the obsession?
 - Is there something you feel you must do or you feel something bad might happen.
 - Rituals may be sneaky like challenging thoughts, breathing exercises, etc.

3. Establish challenging, but manageable exposures or anxiety provoking things to engage with

- a. Refer back to your trigger list and identify exposures to do. For example if you were triggered by a particular TV show, watching that show again might be one. You may have to make it easier such as simply watching a trailer or scene from the show.
- b. Ingredients for an exposure:
 - Anxiety provoking
 - Gradual
 - Potentially Collaborative (with a therapist)
 - Repetitive
 - Prolonged

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4. Establish the rituals you are preventing (most important part)

- a. Connect the exposures and trigger list with the rituals you are trying to prevent. This means doing “nothing” and letting yourself be anxious, uncertain, or uncomfortable.
- b. Seems counterintuitive to do “nothing” when you are getting the signals of threat and anxiety, but giving in to the ritual reinforces the validity of the signal.
- c. Your brain is trying to protect you from perceived threats, it will tell you anything and everything to get you to take the action it wants. By resisting this you are essentially training your brain to undo the necessity of this signal.

5. Do it!

- a. Try an exposure to start with. Reminding yourself of the rituals you are going to resist before, during, and after
- b. Practice radical acceptance to let yourself feel uncomfortable, open yourself to the practice of doing nothing in response to your anxiety.
- c. Each time you reduce, postpone and ultimately resist is a step towards your goal.

Reflection: Identifying your triggers

Identify all of your rituals and safety behaviors

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Establish challenging, but manageable exposures or anxiety provoking things to engage with

Establish the rituals you are preventing (most important part)

Do it!

Inspired by content created by IG: Jenna.overbaugh