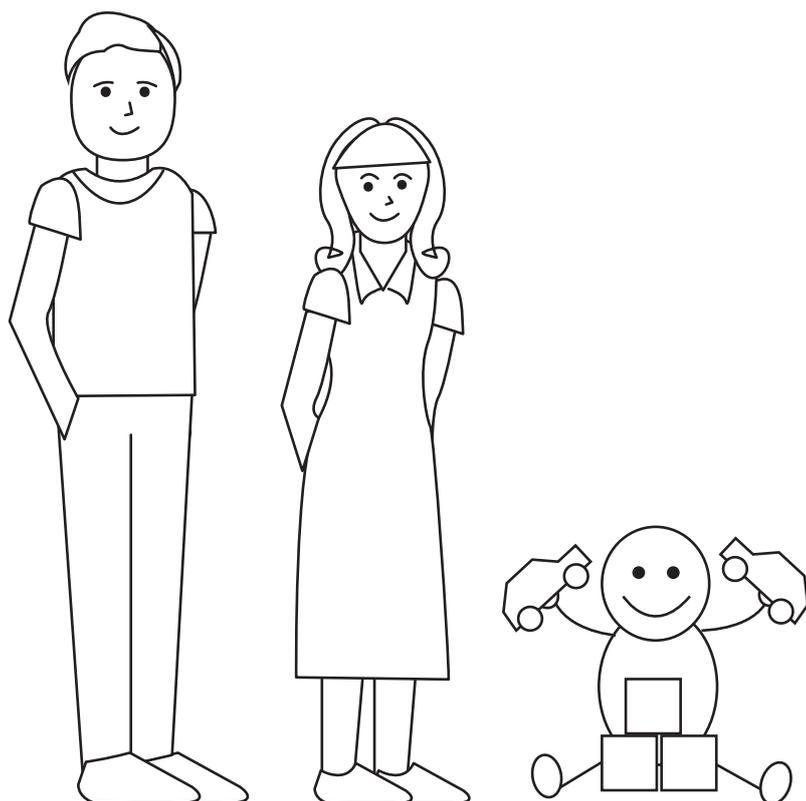


I don't want to be...

# Obsessive and compulsive anymore

A guided self-help booklet for young people.



With **all of us** in mind.

These are the thoughts of two children who worry about things all the time and who do the same things over and over to make their worries go away.

*"I worry about germs all the time. I get so worried. I'm afraid that germs may stick to me or I will catch something from other people. I worry that I will get sick and that I'll infect my family. I feel really anxious if anyone else touches me. If I touch something I wash my hands over and over again to make sure they are clean. I use really hot water and the soap and hard scrubbing means my hands are red raw. In some ways I realise that I'm being daft, but I just don't know how to stop."*

*"I can't get anything done I'm always late for school. I'm worried that something will happen to the house when I'm gone. I have to be the one that locks the house, not my mum. I shut and lock the door, then give it a push to check it's locked, walk down the path, turn back, unlock and lock it again just to make sure. I feel so anxious, it makes me sick to my stomach. Sometimes I feel so bad that I don't go to school".*



We all have habits. Some habits come from being worried or unsure. You might have to double check the front door is locked when you leave the house. You might always cross your fingers for good luck. For some people these habits take over, and can badly upset their day-to-day life.

**Obsessions** are thoughts or images that are out of our control. They come into the mind when we don't want them to. They can be upsetting and hard to stop. Lots of things can set them off. Obsessions come from feeling unsure or scared. They can cause a lot of worry. People can feel trapped by the thoughts running through their mind.

Here are some common obsessions:

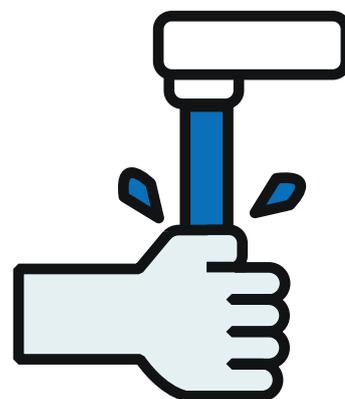
- Fear of dirt, germs, getting ill.
- Fear of acting out violent thoughts or harming others.
- Worrying about order, things being correct.



**Compulsions** are the things that people do to 'correct' or 'put right' obsessions. Often compulsions don't make much sense. People will do the same thing over and over again. This way of coping can make you feel in control. It can make you feel better, but only for a short time. Compulsions don't have to be actions. They can also be mental acts like counting.

Here are a some common compulsions:

- Washing, cleaning
- Checking
- Avoiding things
- Asking for comfort from others
- Thinking 'good' thoughts



From time to time, obsessions come from fears we all have. There could be a very small chance that the worry will happen. You might worry that your house will catch fire. You might worry about someone you love dying. These are common worries. They become a problem when you find you worry about them too much. You can't stop even when you try hard to.



## What are the symptoms of someone who is obsessive and compulsive

Some of the symptoms are listed here. Most people don't experience all of these. You may want to tick any symptoms you experience regularly.

### What we think - obsessions

- Fearful thoughts or pictures in your mind about **being contaminated by dangerous substances**, eg germs, dirt.
- Frightening thoughts/images that some **serious harmful events will occur because of your carelessness**, for example a gas explosion in the house because the cooker is left on, that the house will be burgled because of doors or windows left unlocked.
- Pictures or words in your head that suggest you will **harm others**, especially those you care for and would never want to harm.
- Pictures come into your mind of your loved ones dead.
- Things in your life are not in the **correct order** or not symmetrical enough or in the right place, eg ornaments.



## What we do – compulsions

- Check body for signs of contaminations.
- Wash/disinfect frequently.
- Avoid going to places or touching objects that you fear may contaminate you.
- Check feared situations / appliances or journey route many times.
- Avoid being the last person to leave the house.
- Avoid responsibility.
- Seek **reassurance** regularly from another person that everything is alright.
- Avoid situations you feel will put you at risk of harming, eg hide kitchen knives.
- Think something to yourself to 'put right' the frightening **neutralising thoughts**.
- You put things right or make them symmetrical many times until they 'feel' right.



How do you feel when you experience some of these obsessions?

- Fearful
- Agitated
- Anxious
- Guilty
- Depressed
- Disgusted
- Tense
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

How do you feel when you have then carried out the compulsive behaviour or thoughts?

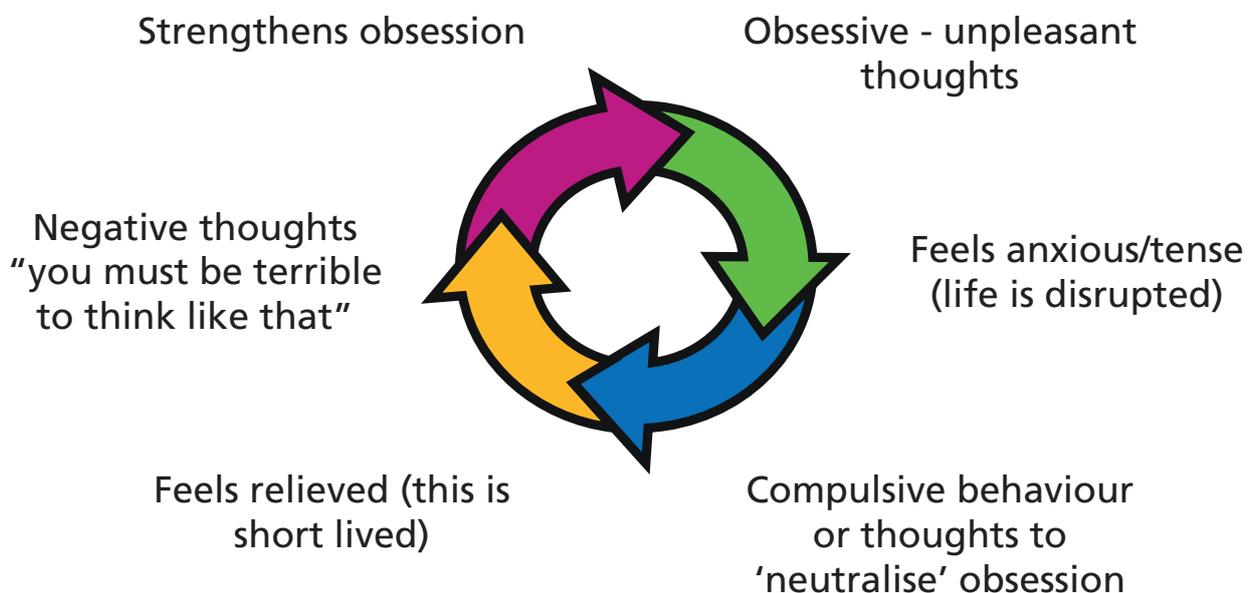
- Relieved
- Cleansed
- Calm
- Relaxed
- Less anxious
- Disappointed
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**If you have ticked several of these thoughts, feelings and actions then you may be obsessive and compulsive.**



Most people who are obsessive and compulsive find that there is a pattern in their thoughts, feelings and actions. They feel anxiety or discomfort at having the obsession and relief once they have carried out the compulsive act. This becomes a **vicious circle** which strengthens itself and becomes more likely to happen again.

Everyone has odd or distressing thoughts and pictures going through their minds at some times. Most people dismiss this from their mind as meaningless. Those who feel most guilty, distressed or disturbed by the thoughts, however, may involuntarily bring them back into their mind because of this distress. The patterns sometimes look something like this.



## Has a similar circle happened to you?

Try and draw it out.



## What can I do to help myself?

Research has told us that the most successful way to stop being obsessive and compulsive is by **exposure with response prevention**. This literally means that you must gradually face or **expose** yourself to the things or situations you fear, whilst at the same time **preventing** yourself from carrying out your usual compulsive behaviour (checking, cleaning etc). This gradual approach means that with each stage you become less afraid of what used to trouble you and you learn by experience that no disaster occurs if you stop your compulsive behaviour.



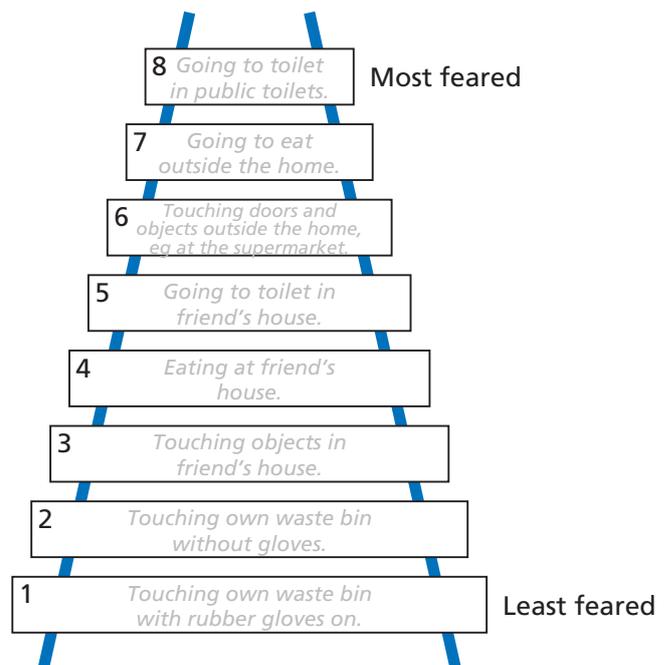
# How can I make facing what I fear easier?

## Exposure

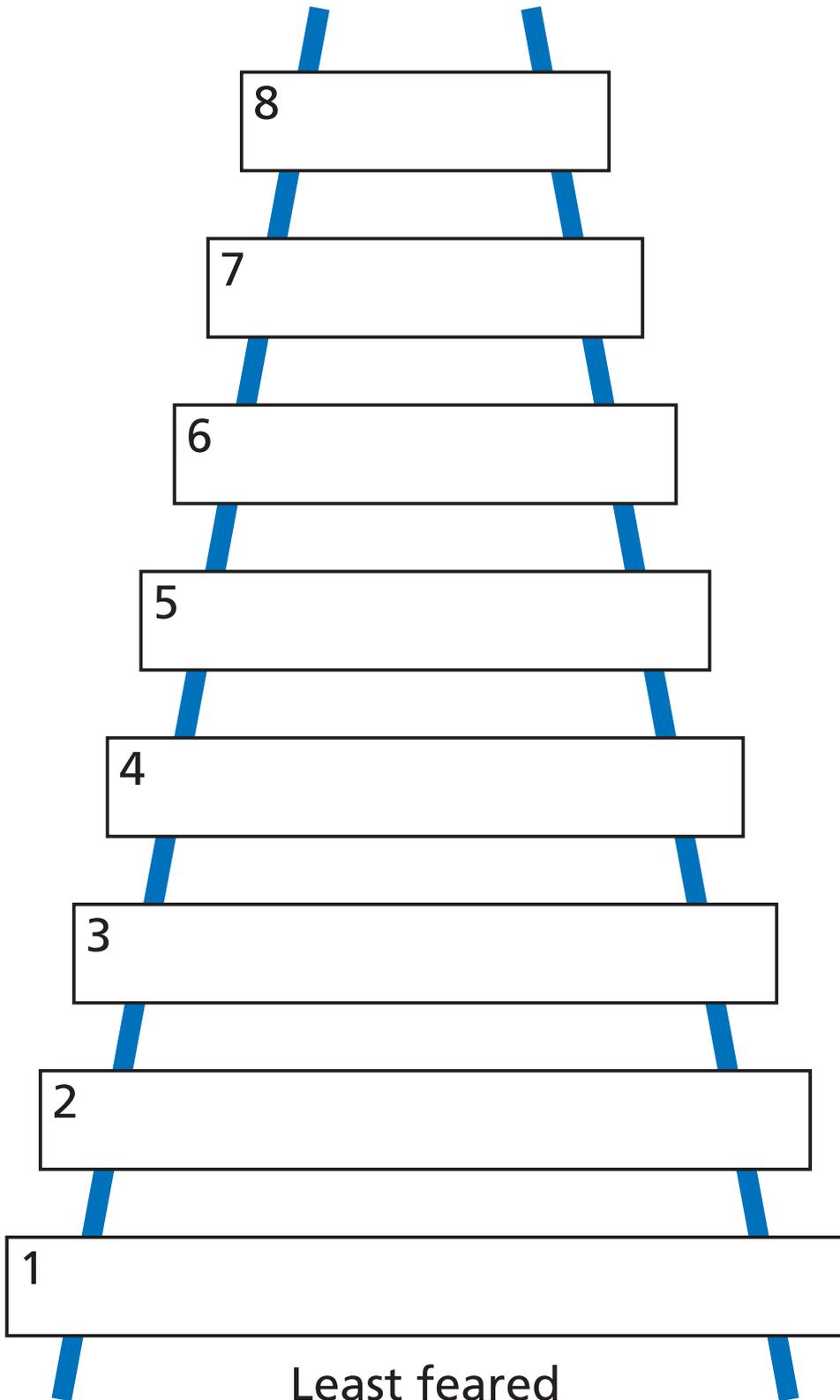
We know that if we can stay in a situation where we feel anxious, gradually the anxiety will reduce - our body becomes used to the situation and we no longer feel fearful. This is called exposure and it will help us overcome our obsessions.

For a child who is obsessive and compulsive however, facing things we fear may seem very difficult if not impossible. Because of this it may be helpful to break down into smaller steps the exposure to situations or thoughts we find difficult. Begin by making a list of all situations or thoughts you find difficult. Next make an 'anxiety ladder' where those situations that you only fear a little are at the bottom and your worst feared situations are at the top.

It may help to look at this example about germs:



Most feared



## Face your fears

When something makes you feel anxious and upset, common sense tells you to avoid it. In this case, common sense is wrong! If you stay in a situation where you feel anxious, slowly but surely the anxiety will ease off. You will feel better. Your body will get used to what is happening. Before you start to face each fear, prepare for how you will feel. You can do this by practising relaxation and thinking of positive things you can say to yourself for example, *“I can cope with this”* and *“I feel terrible just now but this will pass, I’m not in danger.”*

## Preparing for the challenge - Relaxation

To tackle your obsessions and compulsions you will have to face your fears. It is important to think about how you will prepare for this. You will feel very anxious and uncomfortable when you first begin to tackle your anxiety ‘ladder’. Learning to control your breathing will help you to cope better. In situations that make you feel very upset and tense your body will be going into overdrive. Feeling prepared will help you to feel more in control. If you can control your body it will be much easier to tackle the thoughts that worry you.



## Learn to relax

You will remember that worrying often comes with some unpleasant physical sensations. When we worry, changes in our breathing and the tension of our muscles bring on these bodily sensations and make us feel even worse. These changes are warning signs that you are becoming anxious. Next we will learn what to do when you notice these signs.

## Breathing

By learning how to maintain a calm and relaxed rate of breathing, it is possible to stop many of the unpleasant physical symptoms we experience when feeling nervous and worried.

First we need to make sure that you are a **belly breather!** Put one hand on your belly and one on your chest, when you breathe in which hand moves the most? If it is the hand on your belly that's great, if it is the hand on your chest you need to change how you breathe. To get use to belly breathing push out your belly before you breath in, this will help you to get into the habit of belly breathing. It is tricky at first but you will get it with **practise.**



## Controlled breathing

When you're anxious your breathing gets faster. You need to learn to slow it down. Getting your breathing into a natural rhythm will soon get you breathing and feeling normal again.

Follow these three steps:

### 1. Breath in through your nose for four.

*1,2,3,4*

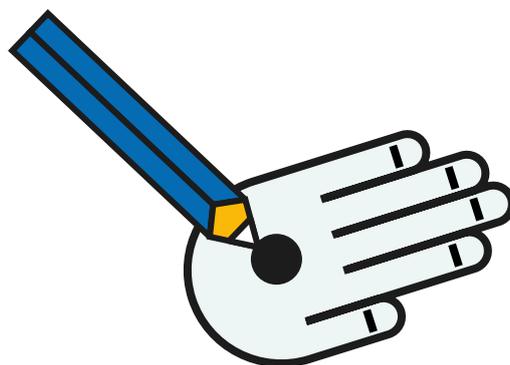
### 2. Hold for two.

*1,2*

### 3. Out through your mouth for 6.

*1,2,3,4,5,6*

To help you to practise this breathing, draw a black spot on your hand.



Every time you notice the spot that you have drawn practise the rhythm breathing once!



## The first step

Now that you have made your 'anxiety ladder' you can start to face your fears. Start with step number 1. Practise doing it until you notice your anxiety lessen. You will likely have to try each step several times. It is a good idea to write down how anxious you feel each time. Rate it from 1 to 10 (with 10 being the most anxious). This will help you to see how your feelings are changing.

**Don't be tempted to move on to the next step until you feel able to cope with the first one!**

## Response prevention

To break the vicious circle you must fight the urge to carry out your compulsions. This is not easy. At first, you might feel that you need reassurance from friends or family that everything will be ok. **But... reassurance does not help!** To feel more confident you must practise coping well by yourself...

- Ask your friends and family to help by not taking part in your compulsions.
- It is important that no one reassures you.
- Take your time and try not to be hard on yourself.
- Make sure that you don't replace old compulsions with new ones. If you usually have to wash your hands make sure you don't replace this with hand rubbing.

- If you find stopping the compulsions impossible, try to cut them down in small steps. For example, if you must wash your hands after touching another person, try to do it for less time, use less soap, use cold water instead of hot.

## Challenging negative thinking

As well as changing how you act, it is important to fight the negative thoughts that keep your obsessions and compulsions going.

You will likely find that the negative thoughts get worse when you begin to fight your obsessions and compulsions . More often than not, they are criticisms of yourself - *"I'm a failure."* or *"I must be a terrible person for thinking like this."* or *"Nothing works, I'll never be able to control this."* These thoughts are part of the vicious circle. They lower your mood and make you feel tense. This makes it more difficult to tackle the obsessions.

Here are some things you can try that will to help you to control your thoughts.

- Write the thoughts down in a diary (page 18). Write down how they are making you feel. This will help you to see if there is a pattern. It will be easier to control the thoughts if you know what triggers them.



- You will find that your thoughts are biased. It is important to come to a more balanced conclusion. Think of a 'Big Challenge Thought'. If your thought is - *"Nothing works, I'll never be able to control this."* - come up with another way of looking at it - *"I can learn to deal with this"*. Find evidence to support your positive thought. Can you think of a time when you have coped well with something else?
- Look at the evidence on both sides. Don't assume your negative thought or obsessive worry is true. Rate how much you believe in the thought (0-100%). Then after looking at all of the evidence, re-rate how strong your belief is. Is it a fact or just what you think?
- Put yourself in someone else's shoes. What advice would you give a friend in your situation? How might someone else see you or your situation? Ask people that you trust what they think. Use what they say to help you to reach a more balanced view.
- Try not to be too hard on yourself. Think about what you can say to yourself that is more helpful and less worrying.



## Thought challenge diary

What am I worried about?

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List my worrisome thoughts

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What am I predicting?

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How much do I believe it will happen? (0 – 100%)

What emotions am I feeling? (Rate the intensity 0 – 100%)

## Challenging your thoughts

What is the evidence for my prediction?

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What is the evidence against my prediction?

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How likely is it that what I am predicting will actually happen? (0-100%)?

What would someone else do?

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What you can say to yourself that is more helpful and less worrying?

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## What if my thoughts are compulsions?

Sometimes obsessive thoughts are followed by thoughts to 'put them right'. Instead of acting out a compulsion you may try to think 'good' thoughts to fight the obsession. An example of this might be thinking *"I am a good person, I would never hurt anyone"* after thinking about hurting a friend or relative.

- Accept the thought - don't try to put it right. Don't try to stop thinking about it. If you are told stop thinking about a pink elephant all you can think about is a pink elephant! Let it pass.
- You are worried about what that thought means. You might think it means you are a bad person. You might think you are going crazy. Challenge this kind of thinking. Weigh up the evidence – Are you really a bad person? What do others think? What else makes you a good person? Thoughts are not the same as actions. We can't always control them.
- You will have good days and bad days. Don't let bad days set you back. Take things one step at a time. Give yourself credit when you cope well.



## In summary...

- Prepare - practise relaxation, control your breathing.
- Face what you fear – don't avoid things.
- Don't rely too much on others – practise coping by yourself.
- Work hard to stop yourself carrying out compulsive acts when you feel anxious.
- Challenge any negative or compulsive thoughts.
- Don't be too hard on yourself – focus on what you can cope well with.
- Take your time, take things step-by-step - you will have good and bad days.
- Talk things through with someone you trust. Use this guide to help someone else to understand your obsessions and compulsions.



**If your difficulties come back... it's not a problem!**

The first thing to do is:

- Tell someone!
- Next, look through this booklet and read all the hard work which you have already done.
- Finally contact your CAMHS primary practitioner

**Your CAMHS primary practitioner is:**

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You can contact them by speaking to a member of school staff or you can contact a member of CAMHS team directly by calling:

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### **The primary intervention team**



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