

Response Prevention Planning: Mental Compulsions

Mental compulsions are completed in response to intrusive thoughts or obsessions. These can be difficult to tell apart, but one way to help is to think of the obsessions as causing anxiety and the compulsions as an attempt to control the anxiety.

Examples of mental compulsions include:

- Reassurance seeking
 - An attempt to find certainty by reassuring self or asking others to reassure you
- Mental review
 - Going over a situation multiple times to find something new, a new way to think about it, check that you did not make a mistake, or determine if you did something wrong
- Mental rehearsal
 - Mentally preparing and practicing before an event/talk/presentation/etc.
- Scenario bending/hypothesizing
 - Combining mental review with a "what if" to think about how you would respond if an experience you had was different
- Mental self-punishment
 - Attempting to make yourself feel anxious/guilty/depressed for a mistake you may have made
- Figuring it out
 - Attempts to review situations and see if you like it, if you are immoral, or if your fear is true
- Thought suppression
 - Pushing down thoughts that are uncomfortable in an attempt to feel better

Response Prevention Plan Examples:

Stimulus Control:

- Change your environment. If you experience compulsions when laying down in bed, get up and go to another room. Get off your couch and go outside. Plan to do your makeup in your room not your bathroom.

Pick battles:

- Pick compulsive urge to challenge. For example, if you have the urge to reassurance seek, scenario bend, and punish yourself mentally rank the strength of the urge, and pick one to focus on.

Postponing:

- Sit with compulsive urge for 5 minutes without engagement, check-in with self and see if urge can be postponed for another 5 minutes

Opposite Action:

- If your urge tells you to practice your presentation, do not practice your presentation
- If your urge tells you to punish yourself, practice self-compassion or self-care and do something nice for yourself

Label mental ritual and abandon:

- Label the urge to review the situation and tell yourself you probably did offend people without reviewing

Undo it:

- If you start to plan what you would do if your scenario was different, imagine how you would not cope with the situation
- If you start to write out a plan, scribble it out and shred it

Non-engagement responses:

- Practice accepting uncertainty by responding to mental compulsions with responses that do not continue the thinking spiral:
 - Maybe I did, maybe I did not
 - I don't know if I harmed someone
 - It makes me nervous to think I harmed someone
 - It would really suck if I harmed someone

Cognitive defusion:

- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) skill of practicing mindfulness and acceptance while creating space from yourself and the thought
 - Thank you brain for reminding me that I need to prepare
 - I'm noticing I'm having the thought that I need to prepare
 - How old is the "I need to prepare" story