EXERCISE 3
OCD DOUBT IS 100% IRRELEVANT TO THE HERE AND NOW

Perhaps with the information on the accompanying worksheet you may now intellectually accept the idea that your obsessional doubts originate 100% from you. However, it is only by applying this information to your obsessional doubts that you can make a difference. In other words, you need to be able to tell whether the reasoning elements that make the obsessional doubt seem realistic have anything to do with the here and now. Some examples of the thoughts and ideas which form part of the reasoning process that convinces people with OCD their doubts are relevant are the following: ‘I can’t remember if I closed the door’; ‘There could be a terrible fire here if the stove caught light’; ‘I don’t feel comfortable not checking the money again’; ‘I could have made a mistake’; ‘I’ve read about so many accidents I’d better be sure’; ‘What if there was even a small risk?’

It may not be immediately clear that these ideas have nothing to do with reality. Obviously, they are about reality. But, if these ideas have nothing to do with the here and now, then these considerations are completely irrelevant. As you begin to question your obsessional doubts you will find that OCD is a very creative disorder, and will come up with an infinite amount of information to keep the doubt alive. You may say: ‘OK, maybe it’s 100% imaginary – but it’s still possible.’ But actually, at the moment you conceive the idea, it is not possible, because it goes against reality, and so this consideration is irrelevant.

In the hundreds of people we’ve seen with OCD, never once did someone have their OCD doubt proved correct. But, of course, the OCD says, ‘Yes, but maybe this time it could happen.’ To become aware of the impossibility of OCD, let’s apply your OCD reasoning to a non-OCD situation. Let’s say you want to cross the road. You look and see no traffic and you cross the road. But if you were using OCD logic you would look – see nothing – yet still doubt against your senses and think, ‘maybe there is a car I can’t see’. So the OCD doubt always goes against objective reality – hence the moment it comes along, it is always unfounded.

To start to put this into practice, pick one of your doubts, and try to remember the last time that this doubt really bothered you. Or perhaps choose a doubt that bothers you right now. Then, question this doubt by asking yourself calmly whether there is or was any basis in reality for the doubt. Do not try to convince yourself of anything, since that is not the goal of this exercise. As you question the doubt, take a note of all the thoughts that go through your mind that ‘argue’ with your questioning, and make it seem the doubt is a valid doubt. Write them down. Take your time with this.

After you have completed the above, take a closer look at all the thoughts that you wrote down that made the doubt seem real and ‘reasonable’. Take a look at each thought individually, and try to determine whether these considerations had anything to do with the here and now (or there and then).

Now, repeat the same exercise, and once again start to question the doubt. However, this time, dismiss each of the thoughts you have identified earlier as not relevant to the here and now as it comes up during your questioning. Write down any considerations that you are unable to dismiss as irrelevant, and write them down on the obsessional story page using the entries. Bring this with you to the next session.

*Beyond Reasonable Doubt* by K. O'Connor, F. Aardema and M.-C. Pelissier.
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