

Handout 11

OCD Relapse Prevention: Quick Tips

Intrusive Thoughts are Expected and May Hang Around

- Remember that even people without obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) experience some intrusive thoughts, so it is OK if you still get them, even after treatment.
- You may notice that the frequency of your intrusive thoughts fluctuates during therapy. That's OK!
- Times of stress may cause OCD symptoms to increase—remember to use the tools you learned in therapy to manage, even if it seems hard.
- New situations can cause symptoms to flare up, such as new romantic relationship, having a child, or change of job.
- If you are on medication for OCD and stop taking it, your obsessions may get stronger.

Remember That Resisting Compulsions Keeps OCD Away

- When you notice intrusive thoughts, pay close attention to your response to the thoughts.
 - Am I avoiding?
 - Am I performing rituals?
- If you answered “yes,” remember to do the opposite of what OCD is telling you to do: Confront fears and resist rituals!

Be Your Own Therapist

- If some OCD anxiety returns, doing the things you learned in therapy will eventually get you feeling better again.
- Even if you are not experiencing high anxiety, remember to regularly challenge yourself to practice nonavoidance and conduct “real-life” exposures.
- Keep a list of helpful strategies learned in therapy so that you can review them after treatment.
- Before treatment ends, make sure to work with your therapist to come up with a plan to help you deal with any remaining challenges on your own.

Lapse versus Relapse

- Know the difference between a “lapse” and “relapse.”
 - Lapse—a partial return of prior symptoms
 - Relapse—a return to symptoms and level of functioning prior to treatment
- Intervene early: A lapse does not have to lead to relapse!

End Therapy with Helpful Resources

- Do not hesitate to call your therapist for help, even if you are only experiencing a lapse.
- Find local or online support groups.
- If family was involved in treatment, they may be a source of support during challenging times.
- Follow-up: Check in with your therapist every 3–6 months to make sure the OCD isn't slipping back in.