
Scripting for Success

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Learning Objectives

- **Describe the rationale for utilizing scripts in the treatment of OCD**
- **Describe 2-3 treatment goals scripting can facilitate**
- **Practice writing a script with the guidance of panel members**

What is OCD?

DSM-5 Criteria

- presence of obsessions, compulsions, or both
- time consuming, distress, impairment
- not due to substances or medical condition
- not caused by another disorder

Prevalence

- 1 in 50 adults, 1 in 100 children
- females slightly higher as adults, males higher in childhood
- fourth most common mental disorder

What are obsessions and compulsions?

Obsessions

- repetitive
- persistent
- thoughts, images, urges
- not pleasurable
- involuntary
- intrusive
- unwanted
- cause distress or anxiety

Compulsions

- rituals
- repetitive behaviors
- mental acts
- feels driven to perform
- neutralize
- “fix”
- avoid
- repeat until just right
- not pleasurable

Themes found in OCD

Obsessions

- contamination
- checking
- self harm
- harm to others
- sexual
- religious/moral
- just right/tic-like
- perfectionism
- symmetry
- relationship
- existential

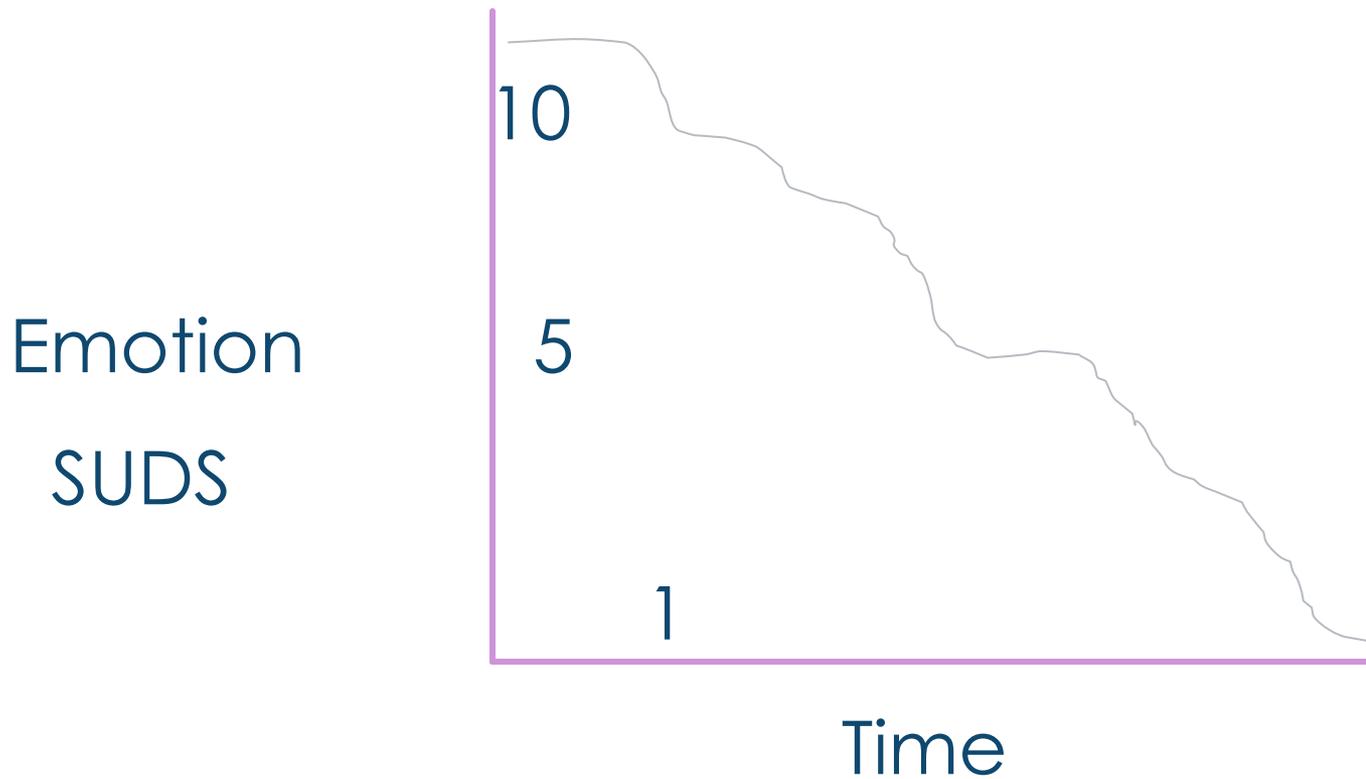
Compulsions

- washing
- cleaning
- checking
- reassurance seeking
- avoidance
- tapping
- praying
- confessing
- rereading
- repeating
- evening out
- mental reviewing

Treatment options

- exposure and response prevention
 - in vivo
 - imaginal exposure
- ACT and other treatment approaches
- individual or family therapy (SPACE)
- outpatient, intensive outpatient, in-patient/residential
- medications
- other medical interventions
 - gamma knife
 - deep brain stimulation (DBS)
 - transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS)

Habituation happens...



What are imaginal exposure scripts?

- a powerful exposure tool, aimed at more intense results
- a written scenario expressing fearful thoughts and feelings occurring in response to an OCD trigger, which brings details of thoughts and feelings to light, increasing awareness
- they help to get the thoughts out of one's head, where thoughts may be vague, changing its vague form into a concrete, specific form

Clinical application of exposure scripts

- for cognitive restructuring – to redefine the OCD as a source of irrational thoughts and unwarranted fear
- to prepare for in vivo exposures
- to control the intensity of the exposure, either in detail or outcome
 - as a hierarchical approach- getting sick from contamination vs. dying from contamination
 - as a flooding approach- as an all-out offensive attack on OCD, more intense and challenging, to address the highest level fears and worst case scenarios

Clinical application of exposure scripts (continued)

- when in vivo is not ethical- one cannot actually do exposure to attacking, killing, molesting, or raping
- when in vivo is not possible- one cannot go to jail or to hell as an exposure
- for primarily obsessionals- as exposure to the possibility/uncertainty that the feared thoughts/actions could happen or might be true

Clinical application of exposure scripts (continued)

- combine with in vivo exposures– listen to recorded scripts while:
 - looking at pictures of car driving off a bridge (for fear of impulsive harming behavior)
 - holding a knife while looking at picture of loved ones
 - using knife to cut vegetables while loved one is in kitchen
 - while playing with, holding, or bathing baby
 - while watching show or movie with attractive member of same sex who is trigger (for SO-OCD), with sound off

Troubleshooting

- if script does not raise anxiety
 - assess for fear of increased obsessions
 - assess for missing elements of anxiety structure
 - assess whether the individual is too depressed to focus/concentrate
- if anxiety does not habituate
 - assess for covert neutralizing (self-reassurance, rationally challenging the thought while listening to script)
 - assess for overt neutralizing (continuing to avoid trigger-driving on bridges, using knives, being alone with baby, etc.)
 - assess if exposure is not prolonged enough or done frequently enough, adjust
- if failure to generalize to day-to-day life: add in vivo exposure

The use of scripts for cognitive restructuring

- Can be utilized at the beginning of treatment
 - to challenge and change (reframe) how obsessions and compulsions are perceived and experienced (to increase “willingness”)
 - to reinforce concepts of ERP (taking risks, changing relationship with anxiety, learning to live with uncertainty)
 - to build motivation (*Lost to OCD*, ACT)
- Can be utilized later in treatment:
 - to increase motivation and confidence for more difficult ERP goals

Using scripts to build motivation

What have I lost to OCD?

When you think about OCD, you most often think about all the reasons it *feels* necessary to give in to its demands. For this exercise, closely examine and remind yourself of all the ways in which you have been hurt by giving in to OCD. It is important to be detailed about the painful aspects of this loss.

- Lost/wasted time:
- Because of OCD, I have been late to _____
- Because of OCD, I have missed _____
- Humiliating experiences: _____
- Financial and employment losses: _____
- Damaged or lost relationships: _____
- Guilt: _____
- Other losses due to OCD: _____

(Used with permission from Jonathan Grayson, PhD- FreedomFromOCD.com)

Using scripts to build motivation (continued)

How giving in to OCD has hurt my loved ones

The purpose of this exercise is to closely examine how you have hurt the ones you love by giving in to OCD. It is important to be detailed about the painful aspects of OCD's impact.

- Forcing them to ritualize
- Making them late to and/or missing events
- Ignoring them because of obsessions/compulsions
- Ignoring them by withdrawing
- Hurting them with my OCD rigidity
- Hurting them with my anger due to OCD
- Other losses due to OCD

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Sample script- cognitive restructuring and motivation

I am sick of what OCD is doing to my life. It's always there at every turn, trying to ruin everything I do. I've lost countless hours each week to cleaning, washing, worrying and avoiding. My children have missed out on playdates, birthday parties and other activities because I was too scared to let them go. I now realize I can't be the mother, wife, or person I want to be if I continue to play by OCD's rules. When I give in to rituals, I not only lose to OCD in the moment, but I also sink deeper into my fears and move further away from being the person I want to be. The only way to win is to stop seeking the certainty my fear has convinced me I must have.

My children deserve a childhood full of fun memories and experiences, not memories of me always telling them to be careful... or to not touch anything... or me wiping them down with wipes the instant they touch something "dirty." From now on, I will lean into the uncertainty that one of us will get the stomach bug because I'm not being vigilant enough. Even though it's a terrifying idea right now, fear is NOT my biggest problem. My biggest problem is the control I try to exert over something that isn't meant to be controlled. From now on, I will use the fear of uncertainty to help me rather than hurt me.

Using Scripts with ERP

- Imagined ERP is necessary for recovery as it helps maintain gains over time when used in conjunction with real ERP as compared to use of real ERP alone (Foa et al., 1980)
- Worst case scenarios
- Allow one to face fears that you are unable to create in real life or to face fears that have future consequences that are impossible or highly improbable

How to use scripts in ERP

- write a scenario that deliberately triggers obsessions and causes anxiety and distress.
- personalize the scenario based on catastrophic fears and beliefs of outcomes.
- read or record it on a POD and listen to it while allowing in, and focusing on, thoughts, images and physical sensations that are elicited.
- do not engage in any behaviors, either physical or mental, to reduce distress elicited.
- continue listening or reading script until anxiety is reduced by at least 50% - allowing oneself to become habituated to obsessions.

Important points for imaginal exposure...



Deliberately focusing on fears will not make them worse

Important points for imaginal exposure...



Thinking about
obsessions will not
make them come true

Important points for imaginal exposure...



ERP and purposely eliciting anxiety is not dangerous

Important points for imaginal exposure...



ERP does not decrease anxiety to the point normal safety practices will be ignored

How to write a script

- First person perspective
- Questions to elicit triggers
- Identify worse fear and feared consequence
- Length of script
- Level of anxiety elicited
- Write in present tense
- End with uncertain or tragic outcome
- Include no reassuring statements

Questions to elicit content

- Where does it take place and what are the details leading up to it? (e.g., Setting – When is it occurring? What time of day? Who is around? Where are you?)
- What are you doing? Your physical movements and actions? (e.g., Stabbing? Walking? Cooking?)
- What thoughts or images come to mind? What is going through your mind in the setting or situation?
- What do you see? Color? Movement? Peoples' expressions, body language or actions?

Questions to elicit content (continued)

- What do you hear? Sounds? Bumps? Sirens?
- What do you feel? Temperature? Pain? Arousal? Itchy?
- What do you smell? Gas? Smoke?
- What body sensations do you feel? Increase heart rate? Panic? Tension? Warm/Cold? Dizziness? Breathing rate?
- What emotions do you feel? Guilt? Doubt? Disgust? Fear?

Questions to elicit fear and feared consequences

- What are you afraid will happen? (e.g., hurt someone? become sick? lose control? steal?)
- If your fear happens, what is so bad about that? What are the frightening events that follow (e.g., fire? accident? death? go crazy? go to jail?)
- If that happens, what does it mean about you as a person? (e.g., careless? immoral? murderer? pedophile?)
- If your fear happens, what does it mean about what others think of you? (e.g., cheater? pervert?)

Format for scripts

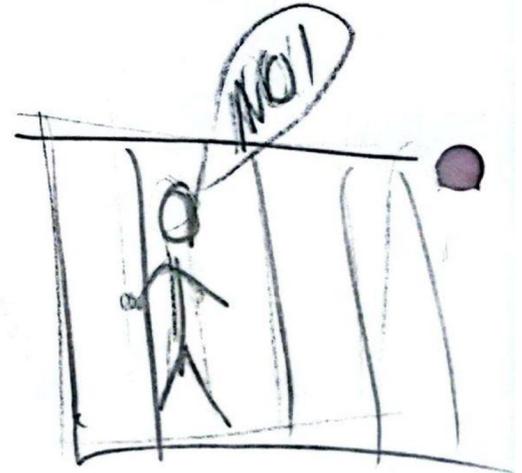
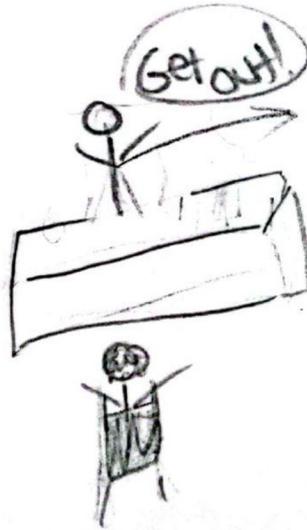
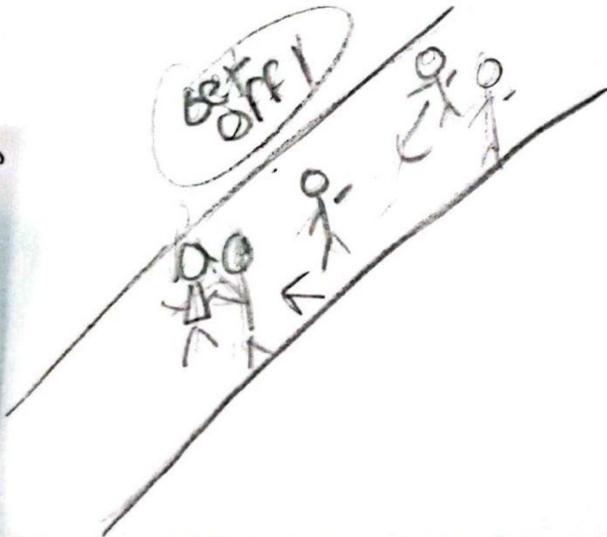
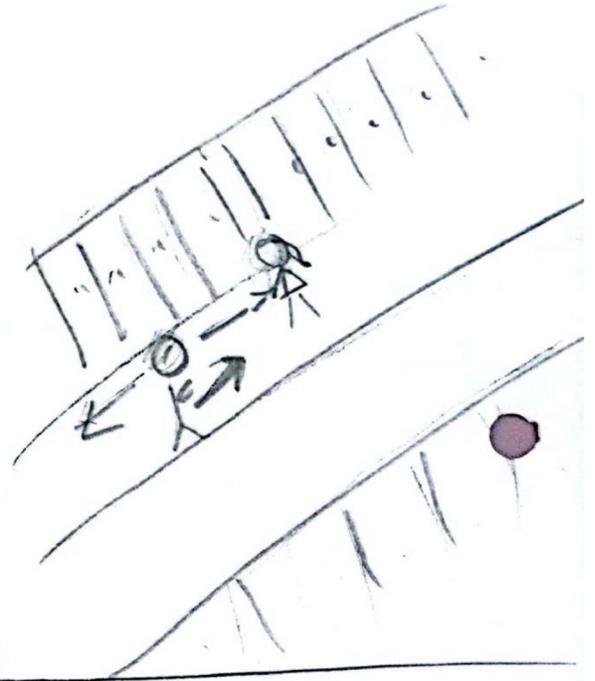
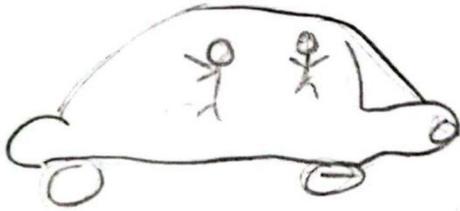
- Trigger situation
- Initial intrusive fearful thought/image
- Emotional reactions; physical symptoms
- Additional fearful thoughts; doubting thoughts
- Urges to ritualize, without follow-through
- What this would say about the person
- Core fears- worst case scenarios

Additional points in writing scripts

- When using scripts earlier in treatment or for lower level anxiety provoking scripts- use vague, general and non-descriptive language.
- Since fear and feared consequence is a possibility, not definitive, language needs to reflect uncertainty of action or outcome (e.g., “may happen”).
- End the script with a tragic or uncertain outcome and the need to take the risk of the possibility of the fear happening in the future

Storyboards for imaginal exposure

MY sexual assault story



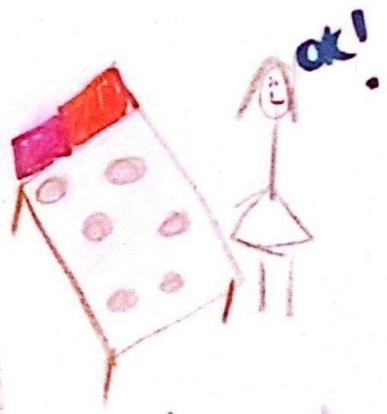
UNPLUG: thinking about it



thinking about fire



Ruining The Neighborhood



(bedroom)



leaving for the night

(dog) died



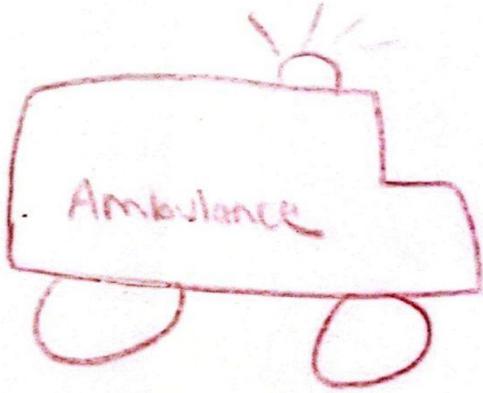
NO more memories
NO more dog
all my fault
everyone hates me

Week 5/27 - 6/1

Not-so-Smarties!



Tilex and Smarties?



Lowest level anxiety script

I imagine I'm making a chicken casserole dinner for my family. I fear I may not have washed my hands well enough after touching the raw chicken. I fear I may end up spreading germs to my family and that they may get sick and die. I fear if this happens it will be all my fault- and I won't be able to live with the guilt. The truth is I have no way of knowing what may happen in the future. I will have to live with the uncertainty that my fears may come true.

Next level...

I imagine I'm making dinner for my family. I cut up the chicken for the casserole and then take the knife and cutting board to the sink. I wash them and my hands at the same time, knowing I have to wash off the germs from the raw chicken so I don't spread them to my family. I really want to wash several times, in a certain way, using bleach- to be sure all the microscopic germs are removed so I don't spread them in my home. Instead, I wash everything once in hot soapy water. As I finish, doubt starts to plague me. Did I truly washed well enough to get off all the germs that could get my family sick with salmonella? I want to wash everything again and use bleach this time, but resist. Anxiety mounts throughout my body, my heart rate increases, and I worry there are still microscopic particles on my hands as I'm touching other things in the house. What if my children or husband touch the same things? I resist trying to recall everything I've touched so I can go back and clean them. My heart pounds and my thoughts spin as the guilt of spreading a deadly disease to my family lodges itself in my heart and mind. What if my children get sick and die and it is all my fault? I could have prevented this from happening if I washed everything well enough the way OCD wanted me to- but instead I choose to live with the uncertainty that my worst fears may come true and I'll have to do my best to cope with whatever happens.

And now we're at the top...

I imagine I'm making dinner for my family. I cut up the chicken for the casserole and then take the knife and cutting board to the sink. I wash them and my hands at the same time, knowing I have to wash off the germs from the raw chicken so I don't spread them to my family. I really want to wash several times, in a certain way, using bleach- to be sure all the microscopic germs are removed so I don't spread them in my home. Instead, I wash everything once in hot soapy water. As I finish, doubt starts to plague me. Did I truly washed well enough to get off all the germs that could get my family sick with salmonella? I want to wash everything again and use bleach this time, but resist. Anxiety mounts throughout my body, my heart rate increases, and I worry there are still microscopic particles on my hands as I'm touching other things in the house. What if my children or husband touch the same things? I resist trying to recall everything I've touched so I can go back and clean them. My heart pounds and my thoughts spin as the guilt of spreading a deadly disease to my family lodges itself in my heart and mind... (continued)

(continued)

Later in the evening, we are awakened by my youngest son, Timmy, crying uncontrollably due to gripping cramps throughout his body. He begins to violently vomit and we quickly gather him up and rush to the emergency room. After multiple tests, the doctor comes in to tell us the news. I see it on his face before he even speaks. "Your son has salmonella... it's the worst case I've ever seen. We need to be prepared." Guilt plagues me. I could have prevented this if I'd just washed everything thoroughly with bleach- but I took the easy way out and now Timmy may be dying. I sit at his bedside and hear his breath becoming more and more labored. I am inconsolable that I might lose him because of my carelessness and negligence. Why didn't I do a better job of cleaning up when I had the chance? I am a terrible mother. How will I go on living with this guilt for the rest of my life? There is nothing I can do now but live with the uncertainty my worst fear may come true- and I will have to cope the best I can with whatever the outcome may be.

Building a book of exposure scripts