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# *How to identify compulsions*

A Guide Developed By  
**Anxiety Center of Tampa**





# *Introduction*

In Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), rituals or compulsions are defined as repetitive, purposeful actions a person feels compelled to perform in order to reduce the anxiety generated by obsessional thoughts, images, or urges.

While the goal of a compulsion is to lower anxiety (which it may do momentarily), compulsions actually increase anxiety in the long run. They keep the cycle of OCD going so that more and more compulsions are needed to bring relief.

Some compulsions, including repeated hand-washing, cleaning, or organizing, may be easy to recognize. Other compulsions can be more difficult to identify. This guide will help you identify a few of these behaviors and help you notice how often you engage in them.

Fill out the worksheets at the end of this guide and bring them to your first therapy session to jump-start your treatment!

# Lesser Known Compulsions

01

**Reassurance Seeking** involves repeatedly asking others whether one's OCD-related fears are valid. For example, one may repeatedly ask a family member to reassure them that they are not "going crazy." Unfortunately, as with all compulsions, the relief experienced is only temporary and soon the question will be asked again.

02

**Avoidance** becomes a compulsion when a person significantly alters their behavior to avoid places, people, objects, memories, or feelings that provoke anxiety. For example, a person with harm OCD may avoid all knives when cooking due to fear of acting on an urge to harm themselves or others.

03

**Safety Behaviors** are designed to reduce anxiety in fear-provoking situations. They become compulsive when a person is unable to engage in an activity without them. This happens, for example, when one is unable to leave the house without a particular "safe" object or person.

04

**Accommodation**, while not a compulsion performed by a person with OCD, can interfere with the recovery process. Accommodation occurs when a loved one alters his or her behavior to prevent or alleviate anxiety in the OCD sufferer. This occurs, for example, when a family member adheres to unnecessarily strict rules or cleaning procedures to keep the house free of "contamination." Those with OCD can become compulsive about demanding accommodation from loved ones.



# *Reflection*



Take a moment to reflect on the previous page. Do you recognize any of these behaviors in yourself? Jot down some of the specifics of the behaviors and the situations in which you routinely do them. Do these behaviors help reduce your anxiety in the long-run? What do you fear would happen if you did not engage in them?

**Reassurance Seeking:**

**Avoidance:**

**Safety Behaviors:**

**Accommodations I request:**



# Tracking

## **We've almost come to the end of our guide!**

It's now time to start tracking the compulsions you identified. The simplest way to do this is by using the two-column method outlined below. Use the blank worksheets on the following pages to track each compulsion. Bring these into your first therapy session to get a headstart on your treatment!

### **Submit**

Complete this column each time you give in or "submit" to the compulsion. Make sure and add the date and circumstances in which each submission occurred.

### **Resist**

In this column, mark each time you successfully resist a compulsion. As in the submit column, include the date and circumstances.



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*EXAMPLE BELOW*

**Compulsion:** Asking my partner "are you mad at me?"  
(reassurance seeking)

### **Submit**

11/04

- Texted after a phone call during lunch break X2
- Asked in bed after turning the lights off

### **Resist**

11/04

- During dinner he seemed quiet - I resisted reassurance seeking

## **Compulsion:**

Asking for reassurance

**Submit**

**Resist**

## **Compulsion:**

Avoiding people, places, objects, memories or feelings that provoke anxiety

**Submit**

**Resist**



# **Compulsion:**

Using safety behaviors

**Submit**

**Resist**

## **Compulsion:**

Asking for accommodations

**Submit**

**Resist**

**Compulsion:**

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**Submit**

**Resist**