

## Module 3: Intolerance of uncertainty

- ▶ The need for certainty is significantly higher among people with OCD
- ▶ Uncertainty/doubt is often hard to endure
- ▶ This includes feeling like things are "not just right" (e.g. *"I see that the light is off, I sit in the dark, and yet I am not sure if the light is turned off."*)

Patients with OCD often try to resolve uncertainty by acting out...

- ▶ Compulsions (e.g., excessive hand washing), rituals, and reassurance seeking
- ▶ Further avoidance and safety behavior (e.g. not touching door handles, only touching door handles with gloves on)
  
- ▶ However, the feeling of certainty is fleeting and it is impossible to prevent all possible dangers

### Emotional reasoning

- ▶ The feeling of uncertainty activates a region of the brain, named the fear center
- ▶ When the fear center is activated, we focus on what could be threatening in the environment
- ▶ The fear actually makes the situation seem dangerous (*"I'm scared, thus, it must be dangerous!", "I feel insecure, so something is wrong here. I must have made a mistake."*)

### Our feelings do not always reflect reality!

- ▶ Recognize uncertainty as a symptom of your OCD and try to gain some mental distance from it
- ▶ Counter your OCD! Find a phrase that helps you to distance yourself from the obsession and tolerate the feeling of uncertainty

### What can you do?

- ▶ Exposure with response prevention is the most effective treatment for patients with OCD. If you already have experience with this, review your previous exposures
- ▶ How does it work?
  - Gradually confront instead of avoid situations or stimuli that can trigger obsessions and compulsions

- Not carrying out safety behaviors and subsequent compulsions/neutralizations

**Exercise 1:**

Find a phrase that helps you recognize anxiety and uncertainty as a symptom and gain some mental distance from it. Examples:

- ▶ This is my OCD!
- ▶ The danger seems real to me because I feel anxious! The feeling itself is not harmful.
- ▶ It is only a feeling or a thought - it is not reality!
- ▶ I accept not knowing for sure if I have done that correctly.
- ▶ 100% certainty is impossible; therefore, I am willing to take the risk.
- ▶ I am calling the shots in my life, not my anxiety or OCD.

Note your personal phrase here:

---

---

---

**Supplement: Depression**

- ▶ Even healthy people suffer from sadness, bad mood, lack of energy, and low self-esteem on some days, e.g. after a crisis
- ▶ Clinical depression: symptoms persist longer (at least 2 weeks) and reduce quality of life and ability to function
- ▶ Depression often occurs with OCD: Depression often results from multiple problems associated with OCD, e.g. social withdrawal
- ▶ Typical cognitive biases, especially **overgeneralization** (*I am always unlucky*) can contribute to the maintenance of depression

**What can you do?**

- ▶ Refrain from "black-and-white" thinking and formulate more helpful / balanced explanations for mishaps and other negative incidents
- ▶ Important: Be specific. Avoid generalizations such as "always" or "never" as well as exaggerated terms for oneself, e.g. "worthless, bad"

- ▶ Do not jump to conclusions directly from yourself to others! Just because you see yourself as worthless, ugly, or untalented does not mean that others see you the same way → There are very different ways of looking at things and different standards

**Exercise 2:**
**Overgeneralizations**

Do you tend to overgeneralize? Become aware of it and replace it with a more adequate appraisal. Add your own examples.

<b>Event</b>	<b>Overgeneralization</b>	<b>Helpful Appraisal</b>
You can no longer close the button of a pair of pants	"I am fat and ugly."	"Too bad the pants no longer fit. Either I've gained weight or it's because they were in the dryer for the first time. My beauty does not depend on a few pounds."
You have failed an exam	"I never succeed, I'm a failure!"	"Yes, I did not pass this exam. That is annoying. I have already passed other exams. I will do my best for the next one."

**Exercise 3:**

## Remembering your strengths

## Tasks:

1. Consider your own strengths
2. Imagine a concrete situation in which you can show these strengths
3. Write down your strengths and according situations

## Example:

Strength: I have an eye for decorating.

Situations: Last week I helped a friend redecorate. That was a huge help for her.

Strength1: \_\_\_\_\_

Strength2: \_\_\_\_\_

Strength3: \_\_\_\_\_

Situations: \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Notes**

Space for unanswered questions or problems that have come up or experiences that you would like to talk about in the next session:

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Other notes:

---

---

---