

Welcome to the *OCD Awareness Scale*.

This Scale was created to help increase the understanding of the wide range of ways OCD shows up for people. A goal of the *OCD Awareness Scale* is to serve as a resource for individuals with OCD, individuals who have a loved one with OCD, people wanting to learn more about OCD, and mental health and medical health providers, trainees, and students. This Scale provides education and awareness regarding OCD – it is not a diagnostic assessment measure. The Scale can be used to help assess if someone has OCD but it does not in itself determine if someone has OCD.

This introduction provides an overview of three things: 1. The main components of OCD; 2. How to use this Scale; and 3. Important points.

## 1. THE MAIN COMPONENTS OF OCD

OCD consists of both obsessions and compulsions. Obsessions are unwanted thoughts, images, or urges that cause a person to feel emotions such as anxiety, distress, disgust, or guilt. Obsessions can also be called terms such as intrusive thoughts or worries. Since the intrusive thoughts can be so uncomfortable, it is common for individuals to try to stop the worries and unwanted emotions (e.g., anxiety) by doing compulsions.

Compulsions, also called rituals, are things people do – or do not do – to try to feel better in the moment. While rituals can reduce one's anxiety or other distressing emotions, the relief rituals bring is only temporary. Also, the more people do rituals in response to their intrusive thoughts, the more it teaches the person that they need to do their rituals when they have intrusive thoughts; this pattern causes the OCD to grow stronger and stronger.

From a treatment perspective, we want to learn how to welcome and be with the intrusive thoughts, since trying to push them away, reason with them, or stop them only causes the worries to come back even stronger. Additionally, we want to learn how to reduce and resist the rituals, since doing compulsions feeds the OCD. Therefore, from an OCD recovery standpoint, understanding the difference between obsessions and rituals is important since the goals of how to respond to obsessions and rituals are different.

## 2. HOW TO USE THE *OCD AWARENESS SCALE*

The Scale is separated into two parts; a section dedicated to obsessions and a section dedicated to rituals. Both sections are further organized based on specific themes/categories. While the Scale outlines many obsession themes and types of rituals, the ways that intrusive thoughts and rituals can present are limitless; therefore, it is not possible for the Scale to include every example of OCD obsessions and rituals.

For individuals with OCD, the *OCD Awareness Scale* can be used on your own or with your therapist, as a way to better understand what obsessions and rituals you experience, which can then help serve as a tool to guide your recovery process. For those without OCD, the Scale aims to provide a user-friendly format to display various ways that OCD presents. For healthcare providers, the Scale can serve as an educational tool to enhance OCD understanding and awareness. It can also be collaboratively reviewed with clients as part of the therapy assessment process and to help assist with treatment goals, such as reducing rituals, developing exposure hierarchies, and coming up with in-between session practice plans.

## 3. IMPORTANT POINTS

It is important to note that it is common for people without OCD to have intrusive thoughts, images, or urges randomly come into their mind (e.g., "What if I decide to turn my wheel and drive into that person walking?"). The difference with OCD is the person's reaction to the intrusive thought. People without OCD do not attach meaning or importance to the thought, while those with OCD get stuck on the intrusive thought and develop rituals to do in response to the worries. Similarly, people can do rituals and not have OCD. For example, some people have specific bedtime routines (e.g., rituals) that they do every night. A main difference between OCD and non-OCD rituals is that with OCD it is very difficult to not do the ritual while for those without OCD the rituals are a choice versus a need.

Another important point to note is there can be overlap between OCD and other mental health conditions. For example, someone with moral- or harm-focused OCD may worry about saying something offensive to others, while someone with social anxiety may have the same worry. The goal of the *OCD Awareness Scale* is to outline a range of ways OCD presents; however, it is not possible for the Scale to highlight all the differences between OCD and other challenge areas. Regarding the above example, if there is uncertainty whether the specific worry is OCD-based or social anxiety-based, just knowing the individual worries about saying something offensive when speaking to others is helpful from a treatment perspective.

Thank you for reading this overview, and I hope the *OCD Awareness Scale* provides value to you.

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This Scale section focuses on intrusive thoughts (also called obsessions). For each theme, intrusive thoughts can present in multiple ways.

For the example intrusive thoughts below, fill in each  box using the approach outlined in **either** Option 1 (detailed) or Option 2 (simplified). Please use the option you are more comfortable with:

- Option 1** | **1 to 10** – You have had the intrusive thought within the past 6 months (1 = *not very* challenging for you and 10 = *very* challenging)  
**P** – You have not had this type of intrusive thought within the past 6 months but used to have it in the past (P = past)  
**N** – You have never had this type of intrusive thought (N = never)
- Option 2** |  – On a regular basis, you have this intrusive thought

### 1. EXISTENTIAL: Do you have worries about ...

- "What if I am not actually real?"  
 "Do I have control over my thoughts and actions?"  
 "What if I can predict the future?"  
 "Does God exist and what does that mean?"  
 People and things around me not being real  
 Death and the afterlife  
 The purpose of life  
 Living in a dream or alternate reality  
 Having free choice and questioning if your behaviors are controlled by outside forces or influences

### 2. HEALTH: Do you have worries about ...

- Having or getting a certain medical or mental health condition(s)  
 Making up having a certain medical or mental health condition(s)  
 Specific health-related appointments or procedures  
 Another person(s) having or getting a certain medical or mental health condition(s)

### 3. MORALITY: Do you have worries about ...

- Being a bad person  
 Doing something immoral  
 Not doing the right thing or making the right choice  
 Needing to punish yourself for your thoughts or actions  
 Stealing  
 Not following rules  
 Not being 100% honest  
 Having judgmental or mean thoughts about others  
 Being wasteful  
 Politics  
 Plagiarism  
 Cheating on work or schoolwork  
 Feeling jealous towards another person(s)  
 Being a good parent, friend, child, etc.  
 Being prejudiced against a specific group of people (e.g., being racist, homophobic, transphobic, or sexist)  
 Feeling frustration or anger towards others or specific situations (e.g., "There is something wrong with me that I felt anger toward my partner. A normal person would not have that same reaction.")  
 Activism (e.g., "I have to donate to a cause weekly or I am not being a good person."; "I need to read every article/post I come across about a specific cause to make sure I am doing all I can to help.")

### 4. PERFECTIONSIM: Do you have worries about ...

- Making mistakes  
 Not doing your best in a given area  
 Saying, writing, or doing things that could have been done better  
 Others thinking your work is not good enough

### 5. NEED TO KNOW OR REMEMBER: Do you have worries about ...

- What other people said during conversations  
 What you said to others during conversations  
 Information that was read  
 Information that was heard on the tv, radio, podcasts, videos, etc.  
 Details from situations (e.g., types of furniture in the room; clothing someone was wearing; facial expressions observed; who people were sitting next to during dinner)  
 Getting rid of certain things and not remembering the specific information in the future (e.g., the exact wording of an email that you deleted; who was on the cover of a magazine you threw away)  
 Getting rid of certain objects and not remembering the memories related to the objects

### 6. RELIGION: Do you have worries about ...

- Having inappropriate religious thoughts and/or mental images  
 Not following your religious practices correctly  
 Family members or others not following religious practices correctly  
 Sinning  
 The afterlife  
 Questioning your faith  
 Upsetting God/higher power

### 7. SEXUAL: Do you have worries about ...

- Your sexuality (e.g., "How do I really know if I am straight or gay?")  
 Your gender identity (e.g., "What if I'm transgender but don't know?")  
 Sexually transmitted diseases  
 Things that may feel sexual (e.g., finding someone attractive; noticing certain body parts of people; eye contact)  
 Having taboo sexual thoughts or mental images (e.g., saying something sexually inappropriate; rape; pedophilia; animals; incest)  
 "What if I do, what if I did, or what if I want to do something sexually inappropriate?"  
 Pregnancy (e.g., "What if I get pregnant by shaking someone's hands?"; "If a woman touches something I've touched, then she could become pregnant.")

### 8. SYMMETRY OR EXACTNESS: Do you have worries about ...

- Even or odd numbers  
 Needing information to be accurate (e.g., if it is 1:31pm needing to be told it is 1:31pm and not 1:30pm)  
 Needing certain things to be arranged or organized in specific ways (e.g., items to be color coded; organized by size, alphabetically, or by another specific trait)  
 Following rules, instructions, or directions perfectly (e.g., need to brush your teeth for exactly 2 minutes based on the dentist recommendation, cannot do 1 minute and 50 seconds)

This section of the Scale is a continuation from Part 1.1 and focuses on intrusive thoughts (also called obsessions). Like in Part 1.1, for each theme, there are multiple ways intrusive thoughts can present within the theme, however, the themes in this section feature additional items to be answered, which are presented with green boxes.

For the example intrusive thoughts below, fill in each  box using the approach outlined in **either** Option 1 (detailed) or Option 2 (simplified). Please use the option you are more comfortable with:

**Option 1** | **1 to 10** – You have had the intrusive thought within the past 6 months (1 = *not very* challenging for you and 10 = *very* challenging)  
**P** – You have not had this type of intrusive thought within the past 6 months but used to have it in the past (P = past)  
**N** – You have never had this type of intrusive thought (N = never)

**Option 2** | **✓** – On a regular basis, you have this intrusive thought

For the additional items in the green sections, please check each  box for every item that applies to you (leave items that do not apply blank).

### 9. RELATIONSHIP: Do you have worries about ...

- Being in the right relationship – the worries can focus on any type of relationship (e.g., romantic, friend, family member)
- Getting stuck on, and over-focusing on, something that you do not like about your partner, family member, or friend

Do you have **RELATIONSHIP** worries about any of these examples?

- "Am I truly in love?"
- "Is this person 'the one?'"
- "Do I really want to be friends with this person?"
- Personality traits
- Physical appearance
- Intelligence
- Schooling
- Career
- Traits such as the sound of their voice, how they walk, etc.
- Interests/hobbies
- Medical and/or mental health conditions
- Religious and/or cultural factors
- Family differences
- Financial factors
- Finding someone else attractive and worrying that means you shouldn't be in your relationship
- Comparing your relationship to past relationships and/or other people's relationships

### 10. SENSORY-MOVEMENT: Are you ...

- Very aware and focused on certain bodily functions
- Worried if a specific body part is working correctly
- Worried about, "What if I can't stop focusing on this body part or bodily function?"
- Not worried, but it just feels really uncomfortable being so aware of the specific bodily function

Do you have **SENSORY-MOVEMENT** worries about any of these?

- Breathing
- Heart rate
- Swallowing
- Blinking
- Tongue placement
- Specific body part (e.g., right leg; toes)
- Body movements (e.g., "What if I forget how to chew?", "I can't stop noticing how I'm walking.")

### 11. JUST RIGHT: Do you ...

- Need to do things in a certain way or else it does not physically or mentally feel right.
- Worry about, "What if this feeling that something is off or just not right never goes away and I always feel uncomfortable?"
- Not have a specific worry, but it just feels too uncomfortable to not give into the feeling to make things just right.
- Worry that something bad will happen if things are not done until it feels just right (e.g., someone will die; a natural disaster will occur; I will fail a test or lose a job).

Do you do any of the following **JUST RIGHT** actions?

- Repeat actions until it feels just right (e.g., getting out of a chair; turning off light switches; brushing teeth; chewing food; rereading words/sentences)
- Move certain objects until their positions feel just right (e.g., location of items on a desk; pillows on a bed; food in the fridge)
- Need certain things repeated until it feels just right (e.g., having your parent or partner say 'good night' until it feels right; replaying a song over and over until it feels right; saying "sit" to your dog, your dog sits, and you keep saying "sit" until it feels right.
- Need to feel just right before doing certain things (e.g., needing to feel just right in order to start making dinner; needing to say a specific phrase to yourself until it feels just right before getting out of bed in the morning)
- Avoid certain actions or things because it will trigger the need to feel just right (e.g., not wearing hats because getting the hat to feel just right on your head can take a long time and causes anxiety)

### 12. RANDOM INTRUSIVE THOUGHTS: Do you have ...

- Intrusive thoughts, images, and/or sounds that are not focused on a specific theme. These types of obsessions include random words, sounds, and/or images that get stuck in your mind. The content of the intrusive thoughts does not cause anxiety. However, the fact that you keep having the intrusive thoughts causes anxiety due to worries such as, "What if I can't stop having these intrusive thoughts?" or "What if they never go away?"

Do you have **RANDOM INTRUSIVE THOUGHTS** about any of these?

- A random image (e.g., balloons; a scene from a movie)
- A random sound (e.g., a beep; part of a song)
- A random word, phrase, or sentence (e.g., dog; I got this; good morning, how are you today?)

**13. HARM:** Do you have worries about ...

- Harming/killing people or animals*
- Harming/killing yourself*
- Causing emotional harm to others*
- Fear of saying something aggressive or offensive (e.g., “I’m going to kill you”; “I hope you get in a car accident”; calling someone a disrespectful word)*

Do you have **HARM** worries about any of these examples?

- Hitting or running over a person(s) or animal(s) while driving*
- Pushing someone into traffic or in front of a subway/train*
- Stabbing, shooting, or choking yourself or someone else*
- Driving off a bridge or into a wall to kill yourself*
- Saying or writing something that could cause harm to someone else*
- Poisoning others*
- Being poisoned*
- Becoming a serial killer*
- Taking too much medication*
- Starting a fire*

**14. REAL EVENT:** Do you have worries or high levels of guilt about ...

- A past event(s) that **did** happen*

Do you have **REAL EVENT** worries about any of these examples?

- Being dishonest or lying*
- Sexual in nature*
- Breaking a rule or law*
- Being unfaithful*
- Alcohol-and/or drug-related*
- Your motives behind making a decision*
- Bullying-related*
- Discrimination-related*
- Aggressive in nature*
- Not owning up to a mistake*
- Wanting to and almost doing something inappropriate (but not actually doing the inappropriate thing)*

**15. CONTAMINATION:** Do you have worries about ...

- Getting sick or dying*
- Getting others sick or causing them to die*
- People, objects, places being contaminated with bad energy or luck*
- Throwing up*
- Being near or touching things that feel dirty/gross/contaminated but not being worried about getting sick or dying*
- Catching something from being close to someone who the OCD feels is contaminated (e.g., catching a trait from that person such as how someone looks or acts; turning into that person; having a feeling that the person is contaminated and needs to be avoided)*

Do you have **CONTAMINATION** worries about any of these examples?

- People*
- Animals*
- Places (e.g., certain rooms; stores; restaurants; towns)*
- Trash*
- Cleaning products and other types of chemicals (e.g., lawn chemicals; batteries; mercury)*
- Objects in public places (e.g., doorknobs; items at stores; sinks)*
- Cultural or religious objects*
- Certain foods or parts of foods*
- Lotions, sunscreens, hand/body creams*
- Certain body parts (e.g., hair; feet)*
- Bodily fluids (e.g., blood; pee; sweat)*
- Types of clothing*

INSTRUCTIONS

This section of the Scale focuses on rituals. The nineteen ritual categories on the right can present across the range of OCD themes. For each category, please select **Yes** or **No** as to whether you have any rituals that fall into the specific category.

Each category includes three ritual examples below. The examples are provided to help show a range of possible ways that rituals can present. Please select **Yes** or **No** to the main category of ritual and do not base your answer on whether or not your rituals are the same as the examples given – because there are so many types of rituals, it is not possible to include all ritual examples below.

|            | Accommodation | Avoidance | Checking | Cleaning | Confessing | Counting | Logic/Reasoning | Mental Reviewing | Numbers/Colors | Organizing/Rearranging | Over-Apologizing | Punishment | Reassurance | Repeating | Re-Reading | Re-Writing | Rumination | Tapping/Touching | Tic-Like Behaviors |  |
|------------|---------------|-----------|----------|----------|------------|----------|-----------------|------------------|----------------|------------------------|------------------|------------|-------------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|------------------|--------------------|--|
| 1          | 2             | 3         | 4        | 5        | 6          | 7        | 8               | 9                | 10             | 11                     | 12               | 13         | 14          | 15        | 16         | 17         | 18         | 19               |                    |  |
| <b>Yes</b> |               |           |          |          |            |          |                 |                  |                |                        |                  |            |             |           |            |            |            |                  |                    |  |
| <b>No</b>  |               |           |          |          |            |          |                 |                  |                |                        |                  |            |             |           |            |            |            |                  |                    |  |

RITUAL EXAMPLES

- 1 ACCOMMODATION:** When another person (e.g., family member, partner, friend) does a ritual for you or helps you do a ritual.

  - Your friend driving for you because driving triggers your harm OCD.
  - Your family not eating in front of you, as people eating makes you worry you won't stop thinking about how your jaw moves when you eat.
  - Your partner not wearing certain clothing styles because they trigger your OCD by making you question, "Am I attracted to my partner?"
- 2 AVOIDANCE:** Choosing to not do something to try and not trigger the OCD or to feel better if the OCD is present.

  - Being on your phone to distract yourself from thinking about your intrusive thoughts.
  - Not going to your religious place of worship because you are worried about having an inappropriate thought during the service.
  - Not watching movies or TV shows with LGBTQ+ themes or characters because it triggers intrusive thoughts about your sexuality.
- 3 CHECKING:** Looking at or directing your attention back to a specific object or question to try and gain certainty about a worry or until it feels just right. It can be a physical act (e.g., checking your alarms) or a mental act (e.g., checking how you feel to see if you are happy enough).

  - Checking your body for a physical response to see if you are attracted to your partner.
  - Turning around after walking by someone to check and make sure that you did not hurt the person.
  - Checking locks on doors or appliances (e.g., stove, faucets, etc.) until it feels just right or to make sure you locked them or turned them off.
- 4 CLEANING:** Actions people take to stay clean or germ-free; to prevent sickness to others or to yourself; to keep your thoughts or soul pure; or to keep objects looking clean.

  - Taking a shower after having an intrusive sexual thought.
  - Washing your hands in a specific way or until it feels just right.
  - Cleaning your home for hours a day.
- 5 CONFESSING:** Sharing information because the OCD makes you feel that you must share it.

  - Telling your parents you did not wash your hands, so they know your hands are contaminated because you are afraid of getting them sick.
  - Saying to your partner that you found someone at the store attractive because you worry your marriage will end in divorce if you are not completely honest with your partner.
  - Needing to keep telling your friend the details of your Real Event(s) to make sure that they fully understand everything that happened.
- 6 COUNTING:** When you count silently, out loud, or visually count numbers, actions, thoughts, or objects.

  - Counting your steps to make sure that you always end on an even number of steps as a way to prove your devotion to your faith.
  - Silently counting by 3's up to 33 when you have health worries to prove to yourself that you do not have memory loss (dementia).
  - Counting the number of "bad thoughts" you had in a day so that you can confess the number to a loved one.
- 7 LOGIC/REASONING:** Trying to problem-solve your intrusive thoughts using rational thinking (this ritual also falls under Reassurance rituals).

  - Convincing yourself that your past mistakes are unforgivable because the thought of being okay with them feels wrong.
  - Using logic and reasoning to try to convince yourself that your worries will not happen or that you will be okay if they do happen.
  - Reminding yourself of your past successes with projects, to try to convince yourself that you will do well this time too.
- 8 MENTAL REVIEWING:** Thinking or picturing details of situations or conversations to try prove to yourself something did or did not happen.

  - Thinking through past memories as a way to prove to yourself that you do exist.
  - Reviewing what you said after conversations to make sure that you did not say anything racist.
  - After washing your hands, mentally picturing the different steps of how you just washed your hands to ensure you washed them well enough.
- 9 NUMBERS/COLORS:** Avoiding or needing to have a specific color(s) or number(s) in routine activities due to their connections to a meaning.

  - Avoiding wearing red because it means you will hurt yourself.
  - Needing the volume of the TV to be on an even (not odd) number to prevent something bad from happening.
  - Avoiding saying or writing the number six due to its connection to the devil.

- 10 ORGANIZING/REARRANGING:** Needing to have specific things in certain places, positions, or orders. These rituals can also apply to arranging people or animals (e.g., each family member has to sit at a specific seat at the table when eating meals).
- *Organizing your toys in a specific way because you will physically feel highly uncomfortable if you do not arrange them in that way.*
  - *Arranging food on a plate so that different foods are not touching one another so that the foods do not get contaminated.*
  - *Organizing your clothes by color to prevent something bad from happening.*
- 11 OVER-APOLOGIZING:** Saying sorry for thoughts, actions, or situations that the OCD makes you feel strong emotions (e.g., guilt or worry) over.
- *Mentally saying “I’m sorry” when walking by someone and having a sexual thought about the person.*
  - *Saying sorry any time you disagree with your partner because you worry that if you both do not agree on everything then it means that you are not in the right relationship.*
  - *Apologizing to God when you have an intrusive religious thought or image.*
- 12 PUNISHMENT:** Choosing to cause yourself harm, pain, or discomfort, or not allowing yourself to feel enjoyment or pleasure.
- *Not allowing yourself to eat your favorite foods because you feel like a morally bad person.*
  - *Washing your hands longer than the OCD is telling you, so you feel pain (from raw hands), to punish yourself for having intrusive thoughts.*
  - *Hitting yourself when you have an intrusive image to prove to yourself that you do not enjoy the intrusive image.*
- 13 REASSURANCE:** Focusing on facts, past experiences, and other types of information in an attempt to gain certainty about the intrusive thoughts or feel better in the moment.
- *Asking people specific questions in hopes that they will answer in a way that will make your OCD feel better.*
  - *Reading articles and blogs about taboo sexual thoughts OCD to find information that reassures you that you do have this type of OCD.*
  - *Taking pictures for visual proof of information your OCD may need you to remember later – such as the type of dog you saw on your walk.*
- 14 REPEATING:** Doing an action more than once, such as doing physical actions multiple times or repeating things in your head (mental rituals).
- *Mentally repeating (parts of) conversations to yourself so that you do not forget the details.*
  - *Redoing routine actions (e.g., getting into and out of bed; turning on/off lights) a certain number of times or until it feels just right.*
  - *Repeating body movements (e.g., blinking; swallowing) to make sure that you still know how to do the movements correctly.*
- 15 REREADING:** Needing to stop and read again what you just read.
- *Rereading books and articles about the point of life and the afterlife in order to try to gain certainty about these topics.*
  - *If you have an intrusive thought about your Real Event(s) while reading, then needing to read that sentence over again.*
  - *Reading the ingredients on common household cleaning products each time you use them due to worries about poisoning yourself or others.*
- 16 REWRITING:** When writing (also includes typing or texting), needing to erase and rewrite.
- *When having a random image (e.g., an apple) while writing, rewriting that section until you can write it without having the intrusive image.*
  - *Erasing and rewriting if your writing does not look perfect or feel just right.*
  - *When given a list, needing to rewrite the items on the list so that they are in alphabetical order.*
- 17 RUMINATION:** Thinking through (or talking through) the different scenarios related to your intrusive thought in order to try to figure out the solution, get certainty, or come to the right answer or action to take.
- *Trying to figure out the reason(s) (e.g., your intention) behind making certain decisions in an attempt to either prove to yourself that your intention was bad or to feel better by proving that your intention was okay.*
  - *Getting stuck trying to figure out how to respond to your OCD when it shows up due to wanting to make sure you make the right choices.*
  - *Replaying facts and situations in your mind in an attempt to gain certainty about your sexuality.*
- 18 TAPPING/TOUCHING:** Using your hand, other body part or object to tap/touch something a certain number of times or until it feels just right.
- *Whenever you have a worry about your mental health, tapping two fingers together four times to keep yourself safe.*
  - *When touching something with one hand, needing to then touch the object with your other hand so your body feels even or symmetrical.*
  - *Tapping your foot each time you have the intrusive thought “Am I real?” to prove to yourself you can feel the ground and, therefore, **do** exist.*
- 19 TIC-LIKE BEHAVIORS:** Making a specific movement(s) and/or noise(s) to prevent something bad from happening or until it feels just right.
- *Having to grunt repeatedly until it feels just right.*
  - *Repeating the last the word you said in a sentence to prevent family members from dying.*
  - *Shrugging your shoulders and then clearing your throat after you have an intrusive thought to prevent the worry from happening.*

### DISCLAIMER

The OCD Awareness Scale is an educational tool. Identifying with items on the Scale does not mean that you have OCD. Qualified mental or medical healthcare professionals diagnose for OCD.