OCD diary

Keep recording brief and time-limited. Agree the purpose with your therapist; the record must not become a ritual.

Editable PDF: replace or delete the fictional examples. Blank PDF: print and write. Guidance follows.

When and how often to record

e.g. Two brief records agreed in therapy; stop at the agreed limit.

ENTRY 1 - date / time: _____

Trigger / doubt

e.g. Sent a message; doubt about causing offence.

Response or avoidance

e.g. Reread and mentally review it.

What it tries to achieve

e.g. Trying to become completely certain.

Time / effect afterwards

e.g. Twenty minutes; doubt returned.

ENTRY 2 - date / time: _____

Trigger / doubt

Response or avoidance

What it tries to achieve

Time / effect afterwards

Pattern noticed / next step

e.g. Discuss mental review as well as visible checking.

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Using this resource

OCD diary

What this helps with

Some compulsions look like sensible checking from the outside; others are almost invisible. Their function can be to prevent a feared outcome, cancel a thought or achieve a particular feeling. This diary helps you notice that function and the impact on your day. It is not a request to count every thought. Agree a small sample with your therapist, such as one or two episodes, and use approximate notes rather than chasing a completely accurate record.

How to use it

1. Choose a short recording period and a small number of examples.
2. Note the trigger and what you felt you needed to make certain or put right.
3. Record the response, including reviewing, reassurance, online searching or avoidance.
4. Estimate time and the effect on ordinary activity; precision is unnecessary.
5. Review patterns once with your therapist and choose a possible treatment target.

A fictional worked example

Dev notices a recurring doubt after speaking to friends. Over two days he records two examples rather than every conversation. One involves twenty minutes of mentally checking his tone; another involves asking a friend whether he sounded rude and rereading the reply. Both responses are aimed at feeling certain he has not offended anyone. His estimates are rough, but they show that reassurance and mental review belong to the same pattern. He also notices missing the start of a film while reviewing. This gives treatment a concrete aim: returning attention to chosen activities without completing each certainty check.

Keep in mind

A diary can become a ritual if you repeatedly revise it, track every intrusion or ask others to confirm its accuracy. Keep it brief and use estimates. Do not stop necessary care, prescribed monitoring or ordinary safety checks solely because an item appears in the diary.

Sources and attribution

Salkovskis, P. M. (1985). Obsessional-compulsive problems: A cognitive-behavioural analysis. Behaviour Research and Therapy, 23, 571-583.

NICE (2005). Obsessive-compulsive disorder and body dysmorphic disorder: treatment (CG31).

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