

Using Coping Scripts to Facilitate ERP

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Training objective

- Objective: Develop a coping script to use in the face of OCD triggers and during/prior to exposures that includes (
 1. the core fear
 2. what they do in the face of it now
 3. the costs to continuing their current approach
 4. what they can do that is more effective, and
 5. why it matters to them to change.

Preparatory Cognitive Work

Identify Core Fear

- What is the core fears generally about?
 - Specific, proximal catastrophic events (least likely) Spiders will attack my face immediately
 - I'll have a panic disorder on a bridge today
 - ** even these examples are more likely to not be proximal, because each time they get in that situation they may have uncertainty about the event
 - Intolerable feeling of uncertainty (I can tell you my fear but not when it will happen) I will get cancer if exposed to X and eventually die
 - What if someone thought what I said was stupid
 - Intolerable feelings/ or right/wrong distinction
 - Touching the doorknob will feel disgusting and intolerable
 - The dishes are organized wrong and I can't stand how I feel when I see them

	Formulation Statement	Content Of Component	Component
exposure target	If I am exposed to this trigger:		<i>Obsession Trigger</i>
RP target	And I do not neutralize the threat taking this action:		<i>Compulsion</i>
	Then this catastrophe will occur:		<i>Core Fear</i>

Preparatory Cognitive Work

Develop a new narrative

- How do you get clients to do exposures when their thoughts and their emotions are telling them it is dangerous?
- Without some new way to talk to themselves, clients really struggle to do their homework
- Developing a coping script helps purposefully engage clients in talking to themselves in a new way when confronted with fears

Preparatory Cognitive Work

Naming Anxiety

- Identifying intrusive thoughts or fears by name
 - “this is my OCD” “this is my Social Anxiety” that is telling me to wash my hands again/stay home from school

Preparatory Cognitive Work

Examining Evidence

- Examining evidence/probability estimationHow likely is it that a bruise on your leg is an indicator of cancer?
 - What are all the steps that need to happen exactly right in order for you to get pregnant from sperm that may be on a public toilet

Pitfalls of these examining evidence: Can become client's new "figuring out" compulsion they use to get reassurance so that they don't have uncertainty

- Use of this approach to increase buy in/loosen certainty about danger, but not to be used during exposures or in coping script

Preparatory Cognitive Work

Utility/Functional Analysis

- **Utility analysis:** how does what you believe lead you to feel, behave; what are the consequences of those behaviors on your life and your values?
- Focus on the **functional outcome** of believing something (not whether it is right or wrong) – how does making this change help you live more fully/more in line with your values?

Coping Script

- A coping script is a recorded script, on a loop, clients listen to during exposure or during/after a triggering event that keeps them focused on treatment goals → explicitly provides the treatment narrative to give exposures a higher likelihood of success
- Focus on the goal of NOT doing the compulsion/avoidance behavior in the face of the trigger

Coping scripts

- Common question about doing exposure is “what do you actually do while exposing and preventing compulsions?”
- The goal is to encourage sitting with discomfort without doing the things that prevent safety learning
- Can help clients a tool to disengage from their typical internal response.
 - Is particularly helpful for internal compulsions
 - *Can see that a client is sitting still for 20 minutes and not checking the stove, but can't see their internal compulsions (mental reviewing, etc*
 - *having a script can give clients a tool for sitting with exposure without doing mental compulsions*

What are the components of a coping script?

- Connecting to the core fear of uncertainty (Category 2)
 - switching the narrative from “I’m scared my parents will die in this storm and I can save them if I just X Y Z” to “I’m scared of the uncertainty that my parents can die at any moment and I have no control over that fact”
- Connecting to the emotion/feeling they are afraid of (Category 3)
 - Switching the narrative from “I can’t handle feeling this way/I’m going to feel this way forever” to “I’m scared this feeling will last forever and I won’t be able to handle it, but I’ve never allowed myself to sit with it so I don’t really know what while happen”

What are the components of a coping script?

- Enhancing motivation
 - Describe how their cycle is not working
 - “even when I do my compulsion, I only get relief for a short time, and then I have to do it all over again. It makes me feel safe but then makes me more certain that I’m in danger”
 - describe the cost of their compulsions/avoidance (loss of time, connection, freedom, genuine connection)
 - “when I spend most of the time with my partner seeking reassurance, I miss out on feeling connected to them and instead am focused on the possibility of losing them. And the behaviors I engage in might make it more likely they will decide to leave me.”
- Say what they want to do instead
 - “Instead of spending time trying so hard to feel certain, I want to tolerate and accept the uncertainty so that I can live my life and spend less time on compulsions”

Coping Script Example 1 - OCD

- I am struggling to accept the uncertainty about whether dad might be shortening his life by working so hard. He may or may not be doing this. I struggle to accept that I can't change his behavior, even though I've tried over and over again. I try to keep him safe by aligning things, praying, cleaning, and doing the dishes, but when I'm not in my OCD brain I know these things don't help keep him safe, or create more certainty that he will die.
- If I do the compulsion, I will get temporary relief, but in the long term, it doesn't affect the outcome of dad's death, but it does make me more scared of dad dying early and more scared of any uncertainty and fear I feel about his death. I'm making OCD stronger by doing this compulsion.
- So instead of doing my compulsion, I'm going to sit with the uncertainty and accept that I can't know when my dad will die and I can't protect him from it. This pain is temporary, and I can tolerate it, whereas when I'm listening to the OCD the pain and fear just gets worse over time.

Coping script Example 2 – Illness Anxiety

- When confronted with a possible health issue, I start engaging in my compulsions to try and feel safe. I believe that I cannot tolerate the uncertainty that someone might be sick and I would be caught off guard. I sometimes have magical thinking that being relaxed causes illness. This is the way that I try to control things that are not in my control.
- This approach is not working for me. It puts me in a constant state of stress that prevents me from enjoying my life. It causes me stress even in anticipation of seeing and communicating with my children for fear that I see something that will make me concerned about their health. It causes strain in my marriage because I'm unable to relax. It impacts my relationship with myself by leading to a lack of trust in my own body and puts me in a state of constant vigilance for possible signs of illness.
- What I want is to be able to deal with health issues when they arise, instead of thinking them through before they arise. I no longer want to treat thoughts related to worst case scenarios as reality, but see them as fleeting anxious thoughts about health.
- I need to develop the ability to tolerate the feeling of uncertainty around health and accept that I might be caught off guard someday. Its a very ineffective to try to be vigilant to health at all times. I will work on accepting the uncertainty and allowing myself to feel the anxiety, let it go up and down, without trying to change it.

Coping script Example 3 – Social Anxiety

- I can never actually know what someone else is thinking. I spend so much of my time fighting the uncertainty that is part of human interactions. Because I'm Asian-American and have been in mostly white communities, it makes sense that I'm unsure of where I stand, if others are making assumptions about me, if someone might be racist. It is not in my control to ensure others like me, that I am perfect in how I communicate, that I do not ever make mistakes, to be perfectly invisible so that no one can reject me.
- This feeling of fear and vulnerability makes sense because my fear of rejection is triggered; it is normal and okay to feel this way, and it will pass, and it doesn't actually imply that there is a crisis that I need to fix or solve. I can sit with the feeling of uncertainty about how others see me, and the intense scary feelings of rejection that are triggered, because nothing I do (like thinking or replaying or figuring out) can actually convince me with certainty that I'm liked. And my lifetime of trying to running away from this uncertainty has led to low self-confidence and fear of social situations big and small. I will practice a new way of managing these hard feelings, and see if I can get a better outcome, an outcome where I feel more okay to be myself even if others don't like me.

Practice: Develop Coping Script with example from own practice

- Identify Core Fear
- Identify what they do now when faced with fear
- Describe how their cycle is not working
- Describe the cost of their compulsions/avoidance (loss of time, connection, freedom, genuine connection)
- Describe what they want to do instead
- Describe what they gain (from a values lens) from making this change

Brave Volunteers to share coping script