
S3C10. The drug dealer analogy

Before your ROCD is diagnosed, you may have already begun to do some compulsions even if not too many or too severe - such as avoidance or distraction. But in the beginning, what seemed like a coping strategy possibly got out of hand soon and you may have noticed some dysfunctionality in your life. The more you kept it hidden or unaddressed, the worse it became, and began to envelope in its fold, various other activities. These activities may have been easy to do in the beginning but may soon have become difficult.

Compulsions are seductive because they do provide some relief in the beginning. For example, feeling that you have cheated on your partner for liking another person may cause anxiety and a confession may make you feel better. It is only when it gets excessive and no amount of confession seems to relieve you that you begin to realize that confession has become a compulsion that you cannot break out of.

Think of it like a friendly stranger you meet at a party, who encourages you to do some 'harmless' drugs. You do the drugs and instantly feel better. And the relaxed feeling makes you want to do more. So, then you start doing drugs recreationally at first and then when you are extremely stressed. Then, you do them even when you are mildly stressed. You're feeling anxious about studies? Here's a pill. You're anxious about results? Here's one more. Feeling stressed over a break up? A pill is the response. This 'friend' has thus systematically robbed you of your ability to cope with stressful situations without the help of these 'harmless' drugs. One not-so-fine day you realize that you cannot operate without the drugs at all; that you're hooked.

Your ROCD is the drug dealer here and your compulsions are the drugs. You do them for relief in the beginning and you like the feeling. Then it keeps getting worse and ultimately you are hooked. By getting you hooked to the compulsions slowly and steadily, your ROCD robs you of the ability to deal with your intrusive thoughts without doing the compulsions.

So, this person (ROCD) who seemed like a friend in the beginning, whom you would rush to for help during anxious times is actually a selfish drug dealer who doesn't care about your wellbeing. He merely cares about keeping you hooked. The best approach for you would be to break off the habit and move away from him. But not only is it difficult to give up the addiction, but your drug dealer is also not going to let go of you so easily. So, what do you do?

To give up the addiction, you have to acknowledge five things:

1. Drugs (your compulsions) are bad for you.
2. You can learn to cope with stress without having to depend upon drugs

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(without doing your compulsions) even though it is difficult.

3. The drug dealer (ROCD) is not your friend, but in fact, an utterly selfish being. When you resist, the drug dealer is not going to let go of a customer so easily and will try to keep you hooked.
4. If you must go to the dealer to get drugs (if you must do your compulsions), it has to be after you've tried everything, nothing has worked and you want some relief. Doing your compulsions is the last resort.
5. Going to the drug dealer is a step back. So, even if you have had to go once, you're going to try harder to not go to him again.

When you have acknowledged and internalized all this, you will stop treating your ROCD as your friend and try your best to implement ERP. You will not immediately rush to get drugs (do your compulsions) but do your best to resist the pull first. You'll give in only when the stress is unbearable. With repeated practice and enough resistance, your body will learn to cope without the drugs (compulsions). In this way you can slowly wean away from your compulsions and work towards your freedom.

In the next chapter, we shall look at the concept of ending the debate.