S5C2. Starting small to recover faster

When you do your exposures start with the ones that would cause you the lowest anxiety if you had to not do them. If the lowest compulsion in your list causes you an anxiety of 2 or 3, you can move on to larger ones. You could try picking out some compulsions that would cause you an anxiety of about 5, and repeatedly prevent the compulsive response until the anxiety comes down to say 3.

Remember that the objective of the recovery is to bring down the anxiety and not eliminate the obsessions themselves. So, it is likely that the anxiety experienced with ERP may never come down to zero. That should not even be the objective. If the anxiety is low grade, say 2 or 3, consider the compulsion handled and move on to the next one. If you spend too much time on bringing the anxiety down to zero, you may end up wasting too much time on one compulsion and derail the recovery process.

At the same time, do recognize that this process needs to be followed systematically. Do not take up more than 2 or 3 compulsions to handle at a time. Focus only on handling the ones you pick in a week and not all of them together. You may want to get rid of your ROCD quickly and that may make you impatient with smaller tasks. You may want to deal with all of it at once or you may want to deal with the biggest ones first. You may believe that if you understand the irrationality, you should be able to stop the compulsion.

However, knowing something in ROCD and being able to handle it well are two different things. If you take on too much, your anxiety levels may shoot up, overwhelm you and maybe dissuade you from working on your recovery altogether. Not being able to handle it may also make you pull yourself down and become self-critical. So, make sure that you do pick up enough to cause you anxiety that you can face, but also not so much that you end up giving up. Work your way down the ladder systematically, with the lowest being handled first and the difficulty levels increasing as the previous ones are managed.

In the next chapter, we shall understand the concept of in-vivo exposures.