
S5C9. Reassurance, *deassurance* and coping

Let us now discuss the reassurance compulsion a little more in detail, as this is an important element of OCD (Haverkamp, 2017) and one of the most deceitful compulsions ever. First, identifying reassurance is difficult. Well, not as difficult as it is confusing. People are not able to understand the difference between what a reassurance is and what is not. So, let me first clear that up.

ROCD, like other forms of OCD, makes us believe that we are incapable of handling difficult situations, because over the course of its progression, everything seems to cause us anxiety and we begin to avoid triggering situations. We do not make an effort to handle the situation, and after a point we seem to lose the ability to handle any triggering situation. We choose to avoid these triggering situations, and we expect everyone else and everything else to not trigger us.

We expect not to be prepared to handle trigger words and so we expect that people around us should not use trigger words. We expect not to be able to handle romantic movies and so we expect that the actors in such movies should not say or do anything that will trigger us. We expect not to be ready for the world and so we expect that we should never see, hear or smell anything that triggers us. But as you can understand, that is not possible. It is like stepping out in the monsoons and expecting it to not rain at all rather than being ready to face the rains by carrying an umbrella.

So, when we expect that the world will behave appropriately (or proverbially dance to our tunes) and seek that confirmation from others or from ourselves, it amounts to seeking reassurance.

In the case of the rain example, if I ask someone '*Are you sure it will not rain?*' or if I tell myself '*I am sure it will not rain*' it is a reassurance. I am not depending on my own strength, courage or ability to handle the problem if it occurs. Instead, I am asking others or myself if others (in this case, nature) will do my bidding. How can anyone be sure that it will not rain? How can I be sure that it will not rain? So, if I am expecting that kind of response, I am looking for reassurance.

You may seek reassurance by asking people repeatedly if they think that your partner is ideal for you. You may see other couples who look better and get the thought that your relationship is not what it should have been. That might make you seek reassurance from your friends, who in their ignorance, wanting the best for you may end up reassuring you. You have completed a compulsion and you feel a little better.

On the other hand, if I tell myself '*I am sure it will rain*', I am not reassuring myself by hoping that the world will operate according to my whims and fancies. I am looking for certainty but I provide my certainty-starved brain the certainty of the other extreme - the catastrophic extreme. One of my friends has coined a word for these statements. She calls them *deassurances*. A *deassurance* is a certainty that is the exact

OVERCOMING ROCD

opposite of a reassurance. Look at the following examples in table 5.9.1.

Table 5.9.1: Reassurance and Deassurance

No	Reassurance	<i>Deassurance</i>
1	Do you still love me?	My partner does not love me anymore.
2	I am sure my partner will not cheat on me.	My partner is definitely cheating on me.
3	There is nothing wrong with my partner's nose.	My partner's nose is definitely odd looking.
4	Is it okay for me to find other girls hot?	It is not okay for me to find other girls hot.

If you see there is certainty in the *deassurance* statement but the certainty is more about the uncomfortable scenario. There is certainly no comfort. *Deassurances* are used in imaginal exposures/scripts. Handling uncertainty is the correct response to a triggering situation but if you must provide certainty, let it be a *deassurance* rather than a reassurance. When you can build the courage to deal with the *deassurances*, you are coping. A coping statement for the rain deassurance would be ‘*If it rains, I will handle it*’. Look at the following examples in table 5.9.2.

Table 5.9.2: Adding Coping to the Mix

No	Reassurance	<i>Deassurance</i>	Coping
1	Do you still love me?	My partner does not love me anymore.	Even if this is true, I will handle it.
2	I am sure my partner will not cheat on me.	My partner is definitely cheating on me.	Even if my partner is cheating on me, I will handle it.
3	There is nothing wrong with my partner's nose	My partner's nose is definitely odd looking	Even though my partner's nose is odd looking, I will handle it.
4	Is it okay for me to find other girls	It is not okay for me to find other girls hot	If this is true and I still find other girls hot, I will handle

THE BATTLE WITH ROCD

	hot?		it.
--	------	--	-----

If you want to devise your coping statements, observe your reassurance seeking statements (where you expect other things to fall in place without effort on your part), turn them into *deassurances* (asserting what your mind catastrophizes to be true) and then add a dash of self-reliance to create coping statements.

People are also often confused between coping statements and reassurances because they think even saying ‘*I will handle it*’ is self-reassurance. The reason why this is not self-reassurance is that there is an element of self-reliance in it. When you say ‘*I will handle it*’, you are not expecting things to not go wrong but preparing yourself to face the worst, if things do go wrong.

So, the rule of thumb is, if I depend on the situation to not go wrong or seek confirmation that it won’t, it is a reassurance. If I am okay with the situation to go wrong and tell myself that I will handle it, it is self-reliance and hence a coping statement. Check out Worksheet 19 which would help you to differentiate between reassurances, *deassurances* and coping statements.

In the next chapter, we shall discuss another sneaky feature of reassurance seeking that is rare but you still need to be aware of.

To-Do:

Practice WS19 - reassurance, *deassurance* and coping