



OCD Midwest Holiday Toolkit

Tools and therapeutic models for
coping skills, making value based
choices, and challenging OCD
during the holiday season



OCD Psychoeducation

Learn more about OCD!

Link: [What is OCD?](#)



What is it?



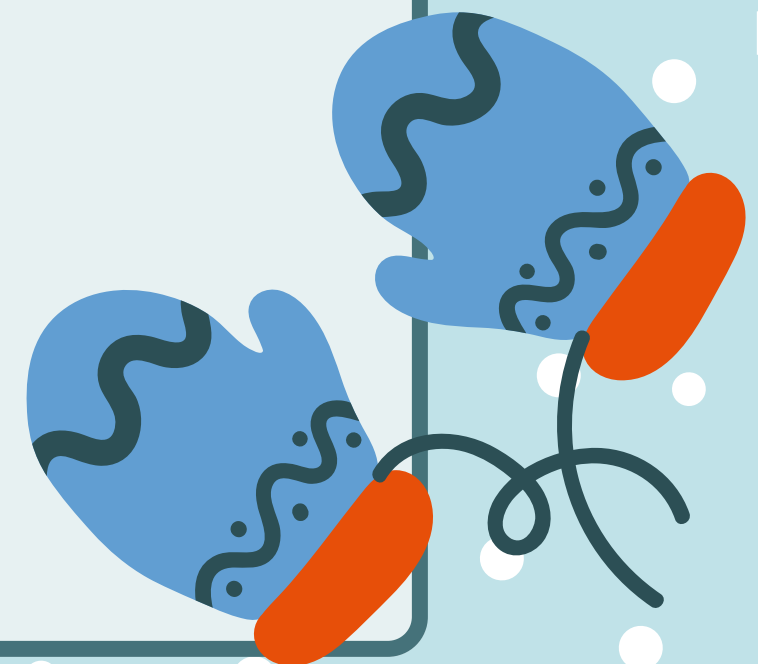
How to talk about it with loved ones



Tips on Accommodation and support



Treatment recommendations





Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

CBT

Identifying how our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors all align and impact one another; and learning how to identify facts from feelings and what is probable versus what is possible. Put that thought up on trial with identifying thinking errors and thought challenge it.

Links: [Thought Challenging Worksheet](#), [Unhelpful Thinking Styles](#)



ERP– Exposure Response Prevention

The holiday season can be a meaningful time—and a surprisingly activating one for people with anxiety or OCD. Changes in routine, increased family time, travel, and higher emotional stakes often bring intrusive thoughts, spikes in uncertainty, and urges to “just make sure” everything is okay.

Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP) is the gold-standard treatment for OCD and a powerful tool for navigating these exact moments. At its core, ERP helps us practice doing the opposite of what anxiety tells us to do. Instead of trying to eliminate intrusive thoughts or neutralize discomfort, we learn to make room for the thoughts and choose actions aligned with our values. A quick and easy way to remember and embrace this idea is to ask yourself “what would I be doing right now if I wasn't anxious” and then see if you can do that, even if experiencing anxious and uncomfortable thoughts and urges.

Here are few holiday-specific examples where you can put ERP principles to use:

Travel, hosting guests, or kids being home from school can interfere with rituals, checking habits, or “rules” people feel compelled to follow. Let a routine be flexible on purpose.

Notice anxiety and stress about the holidays rise and fall without trying to fix it.

Old dynamics or comments from relatives can flare up intrusive thoughts, guilt, or the urge to mentally review every interaction. Practice not replaying conversations for “rightness.” Notice the urge to apologize or over-explain—and choose not to






Decorating, gift-giving, hosting, or trying to “make it magical” often brings pressure to do things just right—a setup for compulsive behaviors. Choose the “good enough” version instead of the perfect one.

Let others help, even if they won’t do it “correctly.”

Make a decision once and commit without researching alternatives.

Practice tolerating “What if this wasn’t the perfect gift?”

Exposure Response Prevention- Tips to keep in mind

-  Talk with your therapist and support person
-  What value aligned exposure would be appropriate for the holiday season?
-  What are your exposure goals and compulsion reduction goals?
-  Plan ahead for some tricky situations.
-  Collaborate with your support person(s) for accountability, encouragement, and celebrating challenging OCD

ACT- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is an evidence-based approach that helps people build psychological flexibility — the ability to stay present, make room for difficult thoughts and emotions, and take actions that move them toward their values. Instead of trying to eliminate uncomfortable internal experiences, ACT teaches skills for acceptance, mindfulness, and committed action. The goal isn't to feel perfect; it's to live more fully, intentionally, and in alignment with what matters most to you.

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

- ***Existing with the thoughts!*** The thoughts themselves are not the issue. It's the alarm bells that go off because of them and the OCD telling us that we need to do something about these thoughts. OCD tries to convince us that our thoughts are reality – when actually, we can exist with these thoughts and the physical sensations that come with them.
- ***The distinction between guilt and shame.*** Natural guilt shows up when we have made an objective mistake. The purpose of guilt is to help you **learn**. Shame often shows up, however. It can be hard to recognize when the shift from guilt to shame happens. Shame is the narrative; it's when we start to say "this means x about me as a person". Try to be curious and notice this shift.
- ***Returning to values!*** What we "should be" doing → figuring out what we *want* to be doing.
- ***Things to do to step away:*** take your dog out to use the bathroom, set timers on your phone to go off randomly throughout the day as a reminder to check in or pause work, cuddle your cat, breathe in the outside air, or have a cup of tea.
- ***Checking in with yourself.*** What might I need at this moment? How can I tend to myself right now? It can sometimes help to ask: "if a friend were going through a hard thing, what might I do or get for them right now?"

Values Exploration

- Mindfulness skill- Dropping Anchor- an ACT technique to help guide us back to the present moment through acknowledging your inner experience, coming back to your body, and reengaging with the world around you.
- Dropping Anchor audio recordings: 2 Mins, 7 mins, 11 min

Link: [Values Exploration](#)

*Resources provided by Dr. Russ Harris

Dialectical Behavioral Therapy

Part of DBT is learning how to emotionally regulate ourselves, improve our interpersonal relationships, and how to set boundaries.



DBT Skills

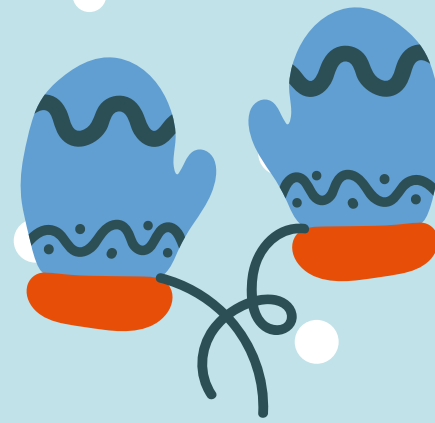
Being with the discomfort/pain. Sitting with the pain and not doing anything about it. Acknowledge pain in whatever form it is in: Hi [sadness / anger / grief / frustration], I see that you're here...

Ways to regulate intense emotions. Slow down and get in touch with what is happening in your body. DBT TIPP Skills are, T-temperature change, I- Intense exercise, P-paced breathing, P- progressive muscle relaxation. Some ideas are: doing a plank, doing jumping jacks, holding ice cubes, running wrists under cold water, playing with your pet or sibling, or eating some sour candy.

Stretching your body: upward salute, toe touch, shoulder rolls, one arm hug, reclined butterfly (noticing stomach expand when breathing in and drop when breathing out), seated fold.



Radical Acceptance Statements



We can acknowledge the reality of a situation while validating ourselves. Radical acceptance coping statements are a DBT-based exercise that allow us to accept challenging situations that are out of our control. It's not about approving of the situation or condoning it, but rather shifting into a neutral mindset in order to effectively cope and problem-solve.

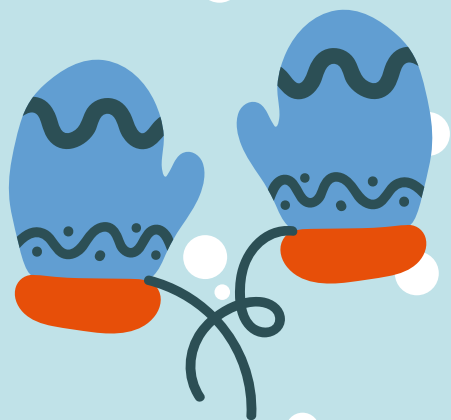
Radical Acceptance

- ***This can sound like*** the past is out of my control; I can't change what's already happened; I don't have to like this to accept it; I did my best and that's enough.
- ***Start small.*** Become comfortable with applying this technique to cancelled plans or being stuck in traffic before attempting to apply it to past trauma.
- ***Beware of*** applying these statements compulsively. Try to use the statement only one time. Note that these statements do not apply to cognitive distortions, such as catastrophic thinking.

DEARMAN

Links: [DEARMAN Practice](#), [DEARMAN Guidelines](#)

A DBT tool on how to identify, communicate, and set boundaries with others.



Radical Acceptance Statements and Coping Strategies

Link: [Radical Acceptance and Coping Statements](#)

I can't change what already happened.

The past is out of my control.

I don't have to like this to accept it.

I might not like it, but this is what happened.

This moment doesn't define me

I did my best and that's enough.

I can feel unsure and keep going

I can't predict the future, and that's okay

I can only control how I respond right now.

I can't change others' actions or words. I can only control how I respond.

This feeling is temporary.

It's okay to feel this way.

Thoughts are just thoughts.

The presence of this thought is not the same as wanting it.



Support System

Who would you say are people that you feel safe with? Who supports you in your therapeutic journey? Who loves you and wants to be there for you? It is important this holiday season that we be around those support people and allow them to support us during difficult times. It may be important to set appropriate expectations with therapy homework, exposures, self care needs, breaks, etc. Get a plan together and identify what are OCD accommodations versus supportive coping skills.



Compassion Fatigue

Navigating compassion fatigue/ Self Care- This time of year can be filled with joy and relaxation and for many it is a time filled with stress, fatigue, and can be triggering. Identify warning signs of when it's appropriate to take a break, step away, and say no to things and others. Where would you go to take a break? Who do you need support from to do this?



Ideas for Taking a Break

Taking a short walk, Reading a book, going outside or another room, listening to music, text or call a friend/support person, take a bathroom break and use a coping skill, have resources on your phone to guide you through a coping skill, take a moment each day to reflect on your proud moments and use various journaling prompts to help you get creative, Take a moment each day to reflect on your proud moments and use various prompts to help you get creative.

Links: [Enjoyable Activities](#), [One Month of Evening Journaling](#), [Review the Whole Year Journaling](#)



What feels Helpful

Also, what feels genuine and helpful to say to be able to take that break? Maybe role play with a safe/supportive person or your therapist.

- "I'm going to take the dog out for a walk."
- "I need some fresh air, I'm going to take a walk alone."
- "I told a friend I would call them and see how their holiday is going."
- Ask a safe/support person to go with you on a walk or check on something in the other room.

The background is a light blue gradient with a repeating pattern of stylized evergreen trees in dark teal and light teal, and snowflakes in blue and white. The snowflakes are of various sizes and orientations, creating a festive winter atmosphere.

Physical Wellbeing

Leading up to and after holiday events focusing on fueling your body with balanced meals and snacks, hydrating yourself on a regular basis, prioritizing a sleep routine, seeking out joyful movement, all of which help body and mind be fueled and rested for upcoming potential stressors. Be aware of and potential limit caffeine and alcohol intake as it can negatively impact anxiety.

The background is a light blue color with a repeating pattern of stylized evergreen trees in two shades of green and blue, and white snowflakes of various sizes. The trees have brown trunks. The snowflakes are simple, six-pointed shapes.

BINGO!

Use a template to customize your experience. You can include values to honor and engage in, exposures to do individually and to do with support, call out the anticipated “drama” of the holiday. Example- odd or funny comment from relatives, cousins joking, bad food dish that someone made, etc.

Link: [Blank Bingo Card](#)

Happy Holidays!

OCD Midwest wishes you a joyful Holiday Season

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Link List



[DEARMAN Practice](#)

[DEARMAN Guidelines](#)

[Dropping Anchor 2 Mins, 7 mins, 11 mins](#)

[Values Exploration](#)

[What is OCD?](#)

[Thought Challenging Worksheet](#)

[Unhelpful Thinking Styles](#)

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[Blank Bingo Card](#)

[Journaling Advent of Gratitude](#)

[Journaling Conversation Starters](#)

