



OCD Worksheets

for Teens & Adults

By Kyler Shumway, PsyD

Understanding OCD

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is more than just being neat or needing things a certain way. OCD actually comes from your body's unique neurological design - it's a neurotype just like Autism or ADHD. In other words, **your mind works differently because it's wired differently.**

And just like with Autism and ADHD, OCD can come with challenges

People with the OCD neurotype often have **highly active minds**. They tend to be thoughtful, conscientious, creative, and sensitive to detail.

But that same mental power can also lead to persistent, intrusive thoughts and urges - the "obsessions" - that feel hard to ignore or get rid of. To find relief, many people with OCD feel compelled to do certain actions or routines, known as "compulsions." These compulsions might include things like checking, counting, cleaning, or repeating - either outwardly or in your head. While these actions can temporarily reduce anxiety, they tend to reinforce the OCD cycle and make things harder over time. It can feel like being stuck in a loop your brain won't let you exit.

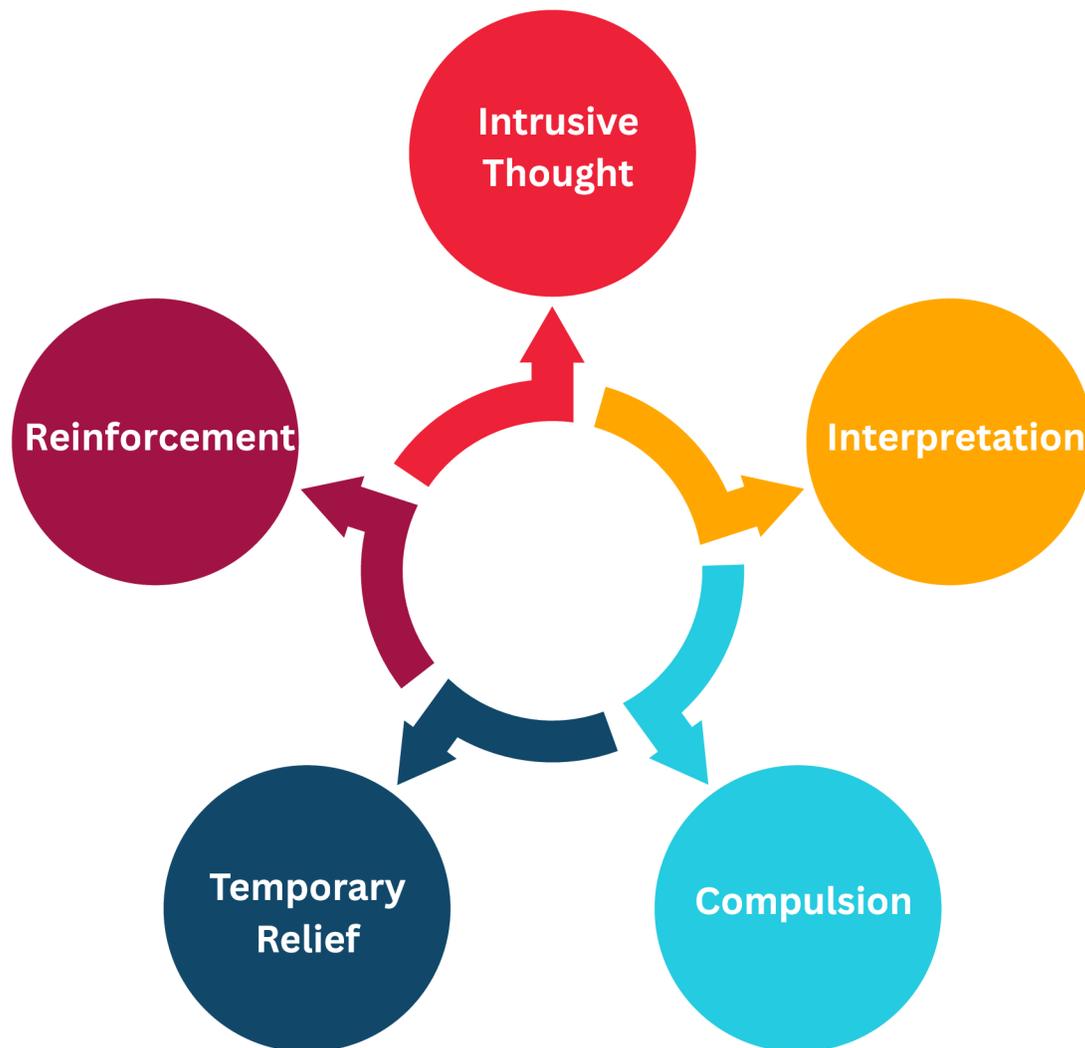
Understanding OCD as a neurotype helps shift the story from "something is wrong with me" to "my brain is doing what it was designed to do, and now I can make choices." With the right tools, you can learn how to interrupt the OCD cycle, tolerate uncertainty, and build a more flexible relationship with your thoughts.

This worksheet is here to help you better understand how your OCD shows up, why it makes sense, and what you can do about it. You're not broken. You're wired differently - and with that wiring comes resilience, depth, and the ability to grow.

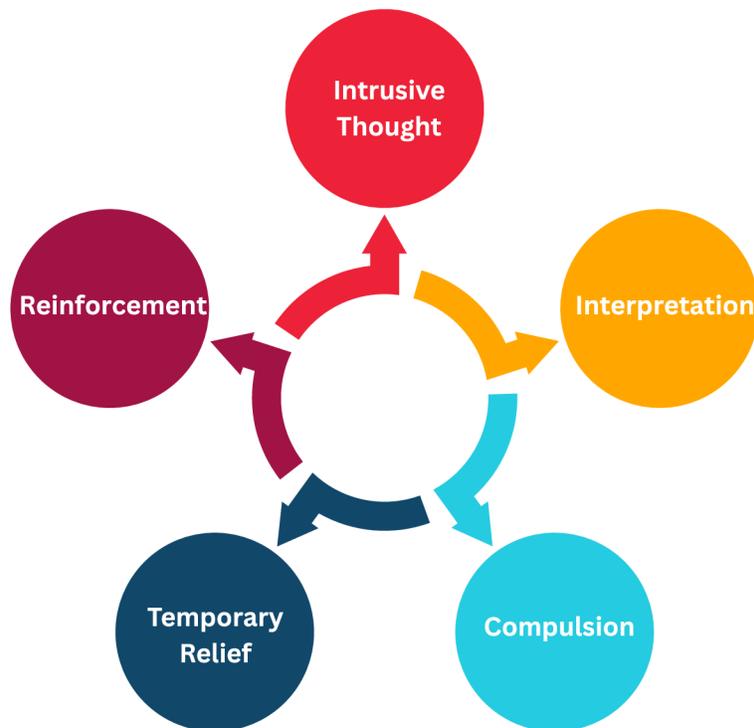
Of course, you don't have to figure it all out by yourself. Consider working with a therapist who specializes in OCD (like those who work at Time for Therapy!) to get the help you deserve.

The OCD Loop

The OCD mind is highly effective at picking up on things that other people miss - including thoughts and feelings. Because of this, folks with OCD can sometimes get caught up on thoughts that don't mean anything, thereby creating what we'll call the "OCD Loop" (pictured below). The OCD Loop explains how obsessions can become deeply rooted over time. On the next page, we'll try breaking down each stage of the loop so that you can understand how this might show up in your own life.



The OCD Loop



Intrusive Thought: Something pops into my mind →

Interpretation: I feel anxious because I think this thought means...

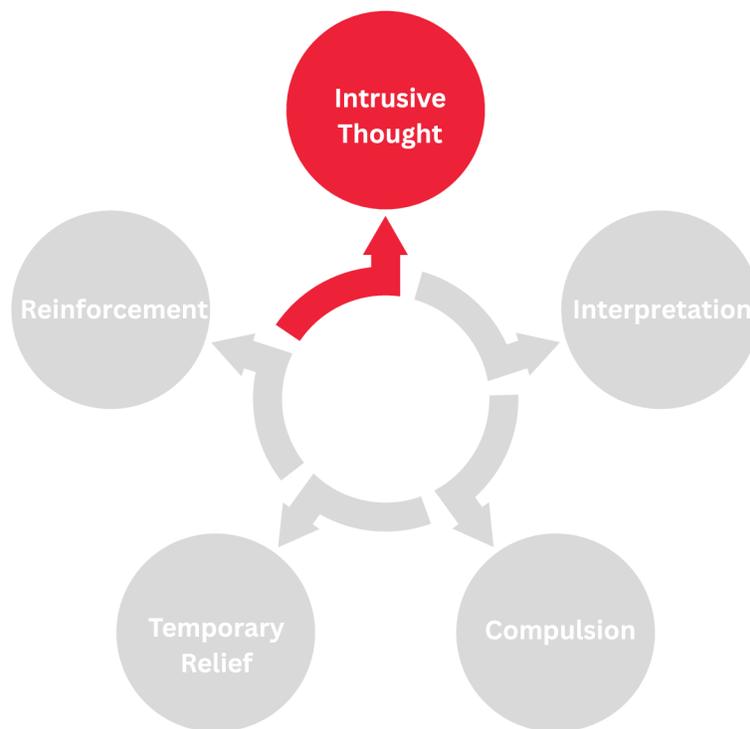
Compulsion: I try to feel better by...

Relief (Temporary): I feel less anxious (but only for a little while) →

Reinforcement: My brain learns to respond like this again in the future

Let's break it down stage by stage...

Intrusive Thoughts

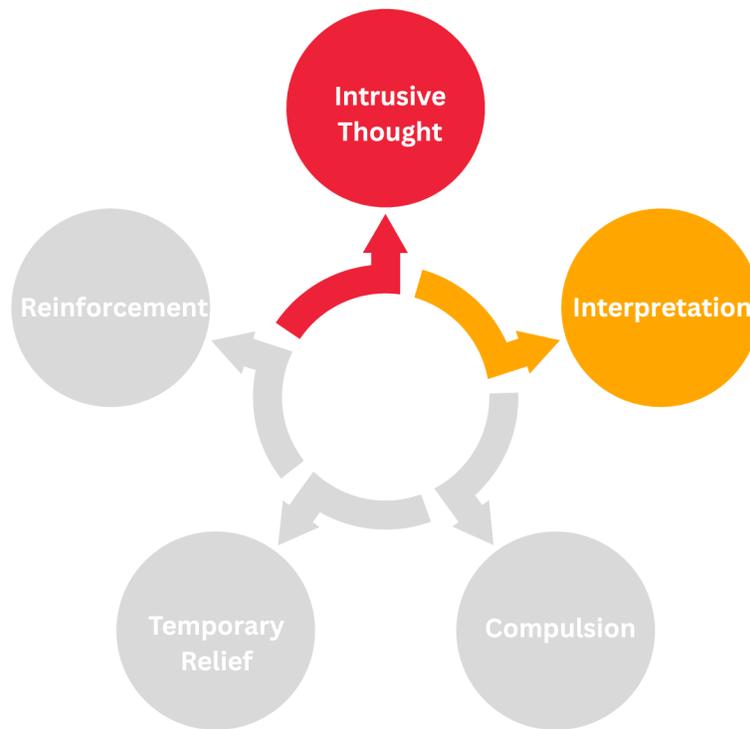


An **intrusive thought** is when something (usually something negative) pops into your mind that you can't stop thinking about. This might be triggered by a memory or something in your environment, or it might just show up "out of the blue".

Intrusive thoughts happen to everyone all the time. Things like "I forgot to turn off the stove at home" or "I might have missed a red light" or "she gave me a nasty look, she must not like me" could all be examples of intrusive thoughts. Usually, we can let those kinds of thoughts go and move on with our lives. But sometimes, they stick in our heads as we ruminate on them over and over again.

Have you noticed any intrusive thoughts lately? Write down some examples in this space.

Interpretations



Here's where things get tricky - the **interpretation** stage. When folks with OCD have an intrusive thought, they are often curious about it and try to make sense of it. But, in doing so, many people come to the conclusion that the thought must signal something bad, which then makes them feel bad.

For example, if you had the intrusive thought "I might have left the stove on at home," you might mistakenly interpret that to mean that you *did in fact* leave the stove on. Or, you might assume that if you did leave it on then that means your house is going to burn down. This interpretation causes immense feelings of fear and anxiety.

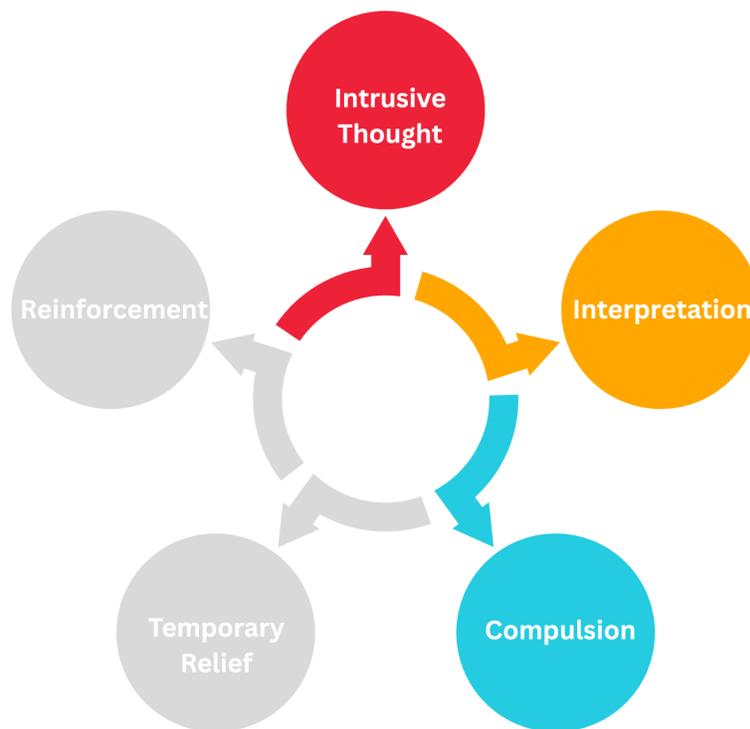
Go back to your examples of intrusive thoughts. What might be some interpretations or conclusions you might have when those thoughts pop up? Write those down in this space.

Let's see if you can guess some ways that these intrusive thoughts might be interpreted as bad news, scary, or otherwise threatening. Try filling out the column on the right just like the examples in the first two rows.

INTRUSIVE THOUGHTS	INTERPRETATIONS
I must have left the oven on...	<i>My house is going to burn down!</i>
What if my dog got loose and ran away?	<i>If I don't check to see where she is, then I won't know if she got loose.</i>
My teacher didn't call on me when I raised my hand...	
What if I run someone over and didn't notice?	
What if I'm secretly a child predator and don't know it?	
What if I don't really love my partner?	
What if I got sick from touching that doorknob?	
What if I spread germs and someone dies because of me?	

The content of intrusive thoughts can be deeply upsetting, but having these thoughts **does not mean someone wants them, agrees with them, or would act on them**. In fact, people with OCD often experience the thoughts that are most against their values. Remember: everyone has these kinds of thoughts at some point. People with OCD are just more likely to investigate the thought than others. As you learn to notice how your mind works, you'll get better at catching unhelpful interpretations before they continue the Loop.

Compulsions

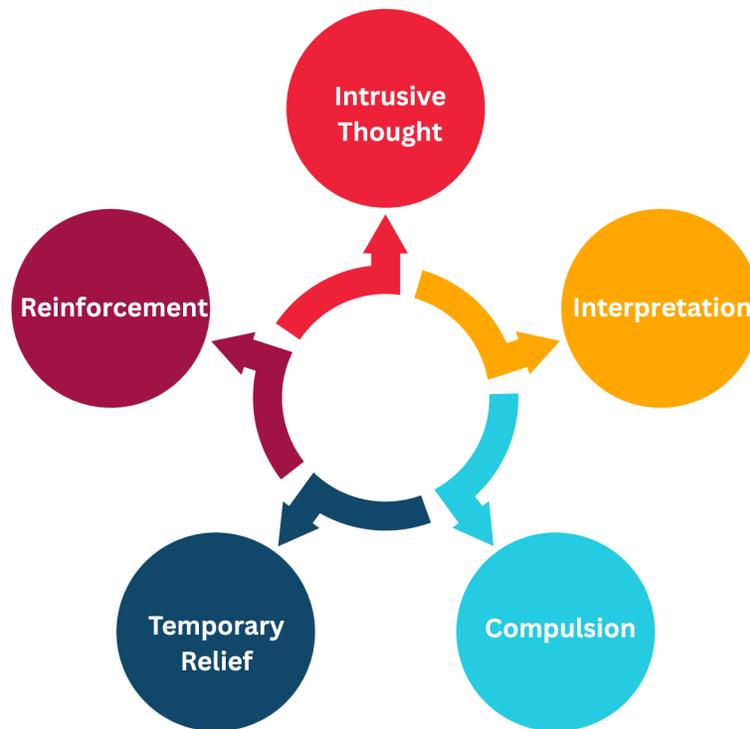


The discomfort we experience at this stage makes us feel motivated to take some kind of action. Sometimes this looks like checking something or seeking reassurance. Sometimes we try to overcorrect to try to prove that the intrusive thought is false. Or sometimes, this can look like setting routines and rituals to help ensure that the badness can't or won't happen. These are all examples of **compulsions**.

For example, let's say you had an intrusive thought about how your boss frowned at you at work, which you interpreted to mean that they didn't like you, which then makes you anxious about losing your job. You might then feel the compulsion to try to make them smile or work extra hard to compensate.

What do you typically do to try to make your intrusive thoughts go away?

Relief & Reinforcement



Ahhhh. When you act on the compulsion, it often makes you feel better - at least, for a while. We call that **temporary relief**. You can let go of the intrusive thoughts for a moment and move on with your day.

The problem is, the relief actually makes things worse over time. The good feelings teach the brain to respond to the stimulus (the intrusive thoughts) by making you feel uncomfortable (bad interpretation and then anxiety) so that you'll be motivated to seek relief through the compulsive behavior. That kind of learning is known as **reinforcement**. Over time, the OCD Loop can create deeply ingrained, difficult to break habits.

What is it like to see the OCD Loop start to finish? What are you noticing as you reflect on how this has shown up in your own life?

Now let's learn about how to disrupt the loop and cope in healthy ways...

The Three Mantras

Everyone (with or without OCD traits) can benefit from using these three mantras. A **mantra** is a phrase or word that you can repeat to yourself (in your mind or out loud) to help keep you focused and remind you of some important truths.

Here are the Three Mantras for OCD:

Thoughts are Thoughts, Not Threats

(Just because you had a thought does not mean the thought means anything)

Feelings are Feelings, Not Facts

(Your feelings are real, but they don't define reality)

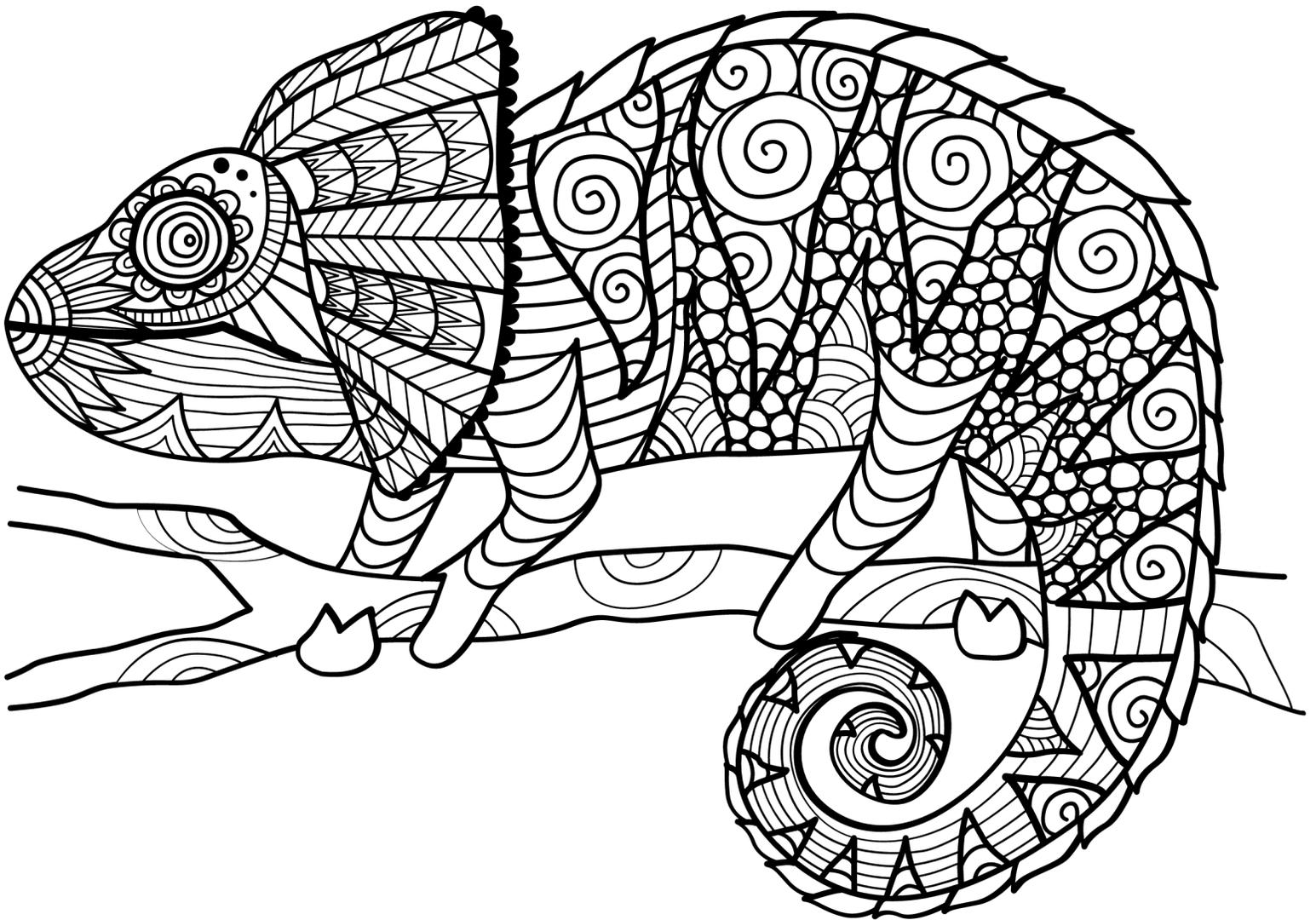
Sensations are Sensations, Not Reasons to Act

(Bodies can act weird, but you get to choose how you live)

To help you memorize these mantras, we'll list each one along with a mindfulness coloring image. Consider coloring the image while occasionally repeating the mantra to yourself - repetition helps!

The next time you notice yourself getting caught in the OCD Loop, try using these mantras. One might apply more to your situation than the others, or maybe you'll find them all to be helpful.

Thoughts are Thoughts, Not Threats





**Feelings are Feelings,
Not Facts**

Sensations are Sensations, Not Reasons to Act



Supports & Strengths

The OCD Loop is easiest to fall into when we lack support. Let's take a moment to map out some resources and other sources of strength.

Supportive Humans

List two people in your life that you can talk to about your problems.

Distractions & Redirections

List at least two things you can do to take your mind off of intrusive thoughts

Relaxation

List at least two things you can do to relax your mind and body that DON'T involve the compulsion

Places

List at least one place that you can go to take your mind off of things or get in a more positive headspace

What Else?

List anything else you think might help you break the OCD Loop

Want more worksheets?

Let us know by contacting us through
our website! We'll keep adding to our
resource library over time.

timefortherapy.com/worksheets

