

# Alter Your Rituals

## Objective

To decrease your compulsive need for symmetry by changing your usual OCD rituals.

## You Should Know

Symmetry-driven OCD describes the irrational fear or obsession that something dreadful will happen if you do not place items or perform acts in a symmetrical, ritualized way. You may feel an overwhelming sense of uneasiness or discomfort when items are not placed in an exact order or certain way. For example, you may experience an overwhelming need for items to be balanced, such as holding a coffee cup with evenly placed hands. You may become upset when words, or items such as shoes or pillows, that you believe should be symmetrical don't line up as you think they should.

Interrupting the patterns of symmetry you feel bound to follow will allow you to enhance your awareness of why, when, and how you perform your rituals in order to honestly evaluate your need for and interest in continuing them.

## What to Do

### 1. List the symmetry-based rituals you perform.

When you are caught up in the OCD cycle of obsessions and compulsions, you may not even realize all the different ritualized behaviors you participate in. Preparing a list requires you to acknowledge and accept your actions and to recognize the impact they have on your life.

### 2. Choose one ritual to focus on.

Engaging in multiple rituals encourages distraction and increases your inability to recognize the damage you inflict upon yourself due to actions you thoughtlessly engage in. Focusing on a particular ritual encourages you to notice and explore all areas of the specific behavior you engage in, helping you find a way to independently choose a different approach instead of having your behavior dictated by your fears and obsessions.

### 3. Explore your ritual.

After a while, you will find that your rituals blend together, with you performing them so quickly that they become second nature. Taking the time to explore your rituals in depth makes it trickier for you to ignore the control they have over you and the impact they have on your life.

**4. Alter your ritual in some way.**

Altering your ritual will allow you to become more mindful of the intense effort and time you put into compulsions, time that could be spent doing something you enjoy instead. Making a conscious decision to change your compulsions also helps you reassert your power over your own needs instead of passively reacting to whatever obsession you are trying to avoid or escape.

**List of Your Rituals**

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Choose one of these rituals to explore further: \_\_\_\_\_

What triggers you to perform your ritual?

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What outcome are you trying to avoid or escape by performing it?

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What specific actions do you do? Must you do them in a certain order or a certain number of times?

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Where are you when you are performing this ritual?

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Who is with you when you are performing it, or are you alone?

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Describe any direction that you feel the items must face.

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What is your body doing during the ritual? Are you standing or sitting? Are you holding something? Must your hands be placed in a certain way?

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### **Altering Your Ritual**

1. Select one or more of the suggestions from the list that follows, or alter your ritual in your own unique way.
2. Implement one or more changes every day for at least a two-week period.
3. When you feel comfortable, try to let go of the ritual altogether.
4. As soon you finish extinguishing one ritual, move on to another.

### **Suggestions**

Change the order of the objects you feel compelled to put in certain way.

Example: *Take the items on your desk and put them in different places.*

Change the order in which you perform the ritual.

Example: *If you feel you must dress in a certain order in the morning, change the order of how you get dressed.*

Change the frequency.

Example: *If you have to wash your hands six times, wash them three times instead.*

Change the amount.

Example: *If you always have to have six pencils with you, try having five or seven instead.*

Change the place where you conduct your ritual.

Example: *If you must get dressed in one room, try to get dressed in another room.*

Change the direction.

Example: *If your shoes must point forward in your closet, place them backward instead.*

Change how you physically perform your ritual.

Example: *If you usually stand, try to sit. If your hands have to be placed exactly on each side of a cup, move them so that one is higher and one is lower. If your eyes are usually closed during your mental ritual, open them.*

Get creative! Think of your own unique way to make small or large changes in your rituals.

Create your Ritual Alteration Chart to help you track your progress.

5. Choose a ritual you want to alter.
6. Describe how you want to alter the ritual.
7. Note your anxiety level when you begin to practice the alteration and your anxiety level at the end.
8. Write down the results of your practice.

Ritual to be altered	Alteration	Anxiety level at beginning of practice	Anxiety level at end of practice	Results of change

Describe the level of difficulty or ease you experienced in altering your symmetry-based rituals.

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Describe any change you experienced in your anxiety level while you were practicing altering your rituals.

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How did your experience altering your rituals add to or detract from your sense of self-awareness and self-confidence?

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## Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?

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