Compulsions Encyclopedia Article

Compulsions

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Compulsions

A compulsion is a persistent, irresistible impulse to perform a repetitive, irrational behavior or mental act. Common behavioral compulsions include hand-washing, cleaning, checking, ordering, and touching. Common mental act compulsions include counting, praying, and repeating words silently. Compulsive acts may need to be performed to exacting specifications. The goal of compulsive behaviors or mental acts is to prevent or reduce anxiety. There is no pleasure or gratification derived from performing the compulsive behavior or mental act. Often, the person feels compelled to perform the compulsive act in order to reduce the anxiety associated with an obsessive thought. Alternatively, compulsive acts are performed as a way to prevent a feared event or situation. Compulsions are excessive (e.g. washing the hands until the skin is raw in order to relieve obsessive fears of contamination) or they are unrelated to the obsessive thought they were designed to negate or prevent.

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