

The OCD School Survival Playbook

Practical rules for navigating uncertainty in school without getting stuck in loops of checking, reassurance, and overthinking.

This handbook is built around a simple idea: clear rules and small habits usually help more than endless rechecking. The goal is not to remove every uncomfortable feeling. The goal is to help students close decisions and keep going.

Version 2.0 — Expanded edition

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PART I

Understanding the loop

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Why this exists

A lot of school stress is not just about the work itself. It comes from getting stuck *around* the work — checking again, asking again, replaying again, or waiting until something feels completely certain.

This playbook was made to give students practical rules for ordinary school situations. It is educational, not clinical, and does not replace professional care.

“We become what we repeatedly do.” — Aristotle

THE SCHOOL OCD LOOP

How the pattern usually works

Many school-based obsessive patterns follow the same shape. A normal situation creates uncertainty. That uncertainty leads to checking or reassurance-seeking. The relief feels good briefly, but makes the same response more likely next time.



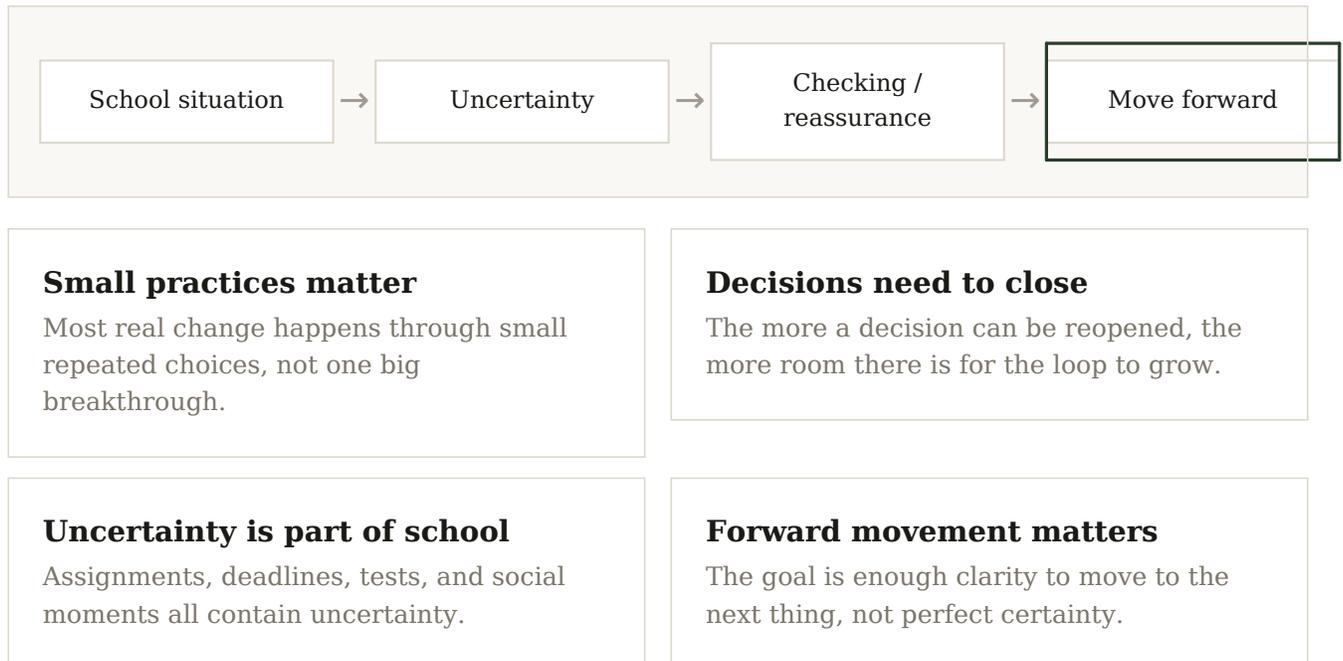
↩ *The cycle returns stronger each time.*

Once a student can see the loop clearly, it becomes easier to stop acting like every uncertain moment needs another round of checking.

A DIFFERENT RESPONSE

Clear rule, then move forward

The alternative is deciding what rule applies, following it once, and moving on without reopening the same moment.



PART II

Rules for practice

THE BASIC RULES

Five simple rules

1. Finish once

When homework is complete, stop. Do not reopen it unless there is a clear mistake.

2. One review

Tests and assignments may be reviewed once. After that, the decision is closed.

3. Speak and move on

After answering in class or making a comment, do not replay the moment over and over.

4. Accept imperfect work

Not every answer has to feel perfect before you move on to the next thing.

5. Move forward

Once a decision is closed, go to the next task instead of circling back.

Practice mindset: these rules are meant to be practiced, not performed perfectly. Improvement comes from reps.

COMMON SCHOOL SITUATIONS

Where these rules show up most

Homework perfectionism

Set a rule before starting: how long the assignment gets and what counts as finished.

Test second-guessing

Read carefully, answer, review once, then continue. Stop the exam from turning into a loop.

Class participation

Say the answer or ask the question, then let it be over. Do not turn a twenty-second moment into a two-hour replay.

Schedule changes

Substitute teachers, room changes, and last-minute shifts are chances to practice moving forward.

Contamination fears

Hallways, desks, and bathrooms can trigger avoidance. Use a clear rule and continue the day.

Social replaying

After a conversation or text, if there is no concrete harm to fix, do not reopen it mentally.

PART III

Case studies

EXAMPLES

How the rules work in real situations

Case study 1 – Homework loop

A student spends two hours rewriting a one-page assignment. The rule: thirty-five minutes of work, one review, then submit. The loop loses strength over time.

Case study 2 – Test second-guessing

A student keeps changing answers during exams. New rule: read carefully, choose an answer, review once at the end, and stop.

Case study 3 – Participation anxiety

A student avoids raising a hand. New rule: one short comment per class, no replay afterward. The point is doing the rep, not feeling calm first.

Case study 4 – Moral replaying

A student keeps reviewing conversations for wrongdoing. Rule: if there is no clear harm to fix, do not keep reopening it. Let the moment stay in the past.

TEACHER QUICK REFERENCE

For teachers and counselors

Adults often want to help by checking again, reassuring again, or removing every uncertain situation. The better target is support that builds forward movement.

What often happens	What can backfire	What helps more
Student checks work repeatedly	Reviewing it over and over with them	Set a completion standard; submit after one review.
Student asks if the answer is right	Repeated confirmation	"You checked it once. That's enough. Turn it in."
Student avoids participation	Removing every chance to participate	Set one brief participation rep and move on.
Student stuck after schedule change	Making the day feel perfectly settled	"It changed. You can still continue."

Quick principle: the goal is not to become another source of reassurance. Help the student finish, decide, and keep moving.

STUDENT RULE SHEET

One-page rule card

This can be printed, folded, or kept in a binder, notebook, or locker. Simple enough to remember during a normal school day.

Finish once.

Review once.

Speak and move on.

Accept imperfect work.

Move forward.

How to use it

Pick the rule that fits the situation. Apply it once. The point is to help close the moment and keep the day moving.

Best times to use it

- Before turning in homework
- During the last minutes of a test
- Right after speaking in class
- After a social moment you want to replay
- During an unexpected change in the school day

GUIDANCE FOR PARENTS

Support without feeding the loop

What helps

Encourage stopping rules for homework. Keep expectations clear. Notice effort and follow-through more than perfection.

What often backfires

Repeated reassurance, repeated checking, or helping the student reopen the same decision again and again. Short-term relief strengthens the pattern.

Parents just need a few clear principles: help the student finish, stop reopening decisions, and keep moving when the day feels uncertain.

PART IV

Sources & limits

SOURCES AND INFLUENCES

Where the ideas come from

Praxis Minor draws on Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Exposure and Response Prevention, research on uncertainty tolerance, and habit formation. It translates a few useful ideas into plain language for school settings.

Main areas

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
- Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP)
- Uncertainty tolerance
- Habit formation and decision-making

Suggested reading

- *Freedom from OCD* — Jonathan Grayson
- *The Imp of the Mind* — Lee Baer
- *Overcoming Unwanted Intrusive Thoughts* — Winston & Seif
- International OCD Foundation resources

Important note: this handbook provides educational ideas only and does not replace professional mental health care.

Praxis Minor — Small practices. Clear rules. Move forward.