



Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) – PARENTS GUIDE

WHAT IS OCD?

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is characterised by intrusive thoughts (obsessions) and repetitive behaviours (compulsions). It is a long lasting disorder in which a person experiences uncontrollable and recurring thoughts which can lead to repetitive behaviours.

OBSESSIONS

Obsessions are unwelcome or intrusive thoughts, worries, feelings, urges or doubts. Children may worry something bad will happen, they may worry they will hurt others. They may worry that they may become contaminated by germs and viruses and have a general feeling or sense that something is wrong or that something bad is going to happen. Sometimes there may be intrusive violent or sexual thoughts.

COMPULSIONS

Compulsions are behaviours or actions that someone with OCD feels they have to do in order to reduce their anxiety, get rid of the distressing thoughts, to stop something bad from happening. Compulsions are different for everyone but they can include checking things such as are doors locked, things turned off, checking memories to make sure they haven't hurt anyone, asking others for reassurance, repeatedly cleaning or washing their own body or objects, having internal arguments about whether they have done something bad, counting or repeating phrases, arranging objects in specific patterns and avoiding situations, people, places or activities that trigger upsetting thoughts.

WHAT DOES OCD LOOK LIKE?

- Recurrent, persistent thoughts, urges, or images that are intrusive and cause distress
- Repetitive behaviours or mental acts performed to reduce anxiety or prevent a feared event
- Excessive worry about germs or contamination
- Need for things to be symmetrical or in a perfect order
- Repeatedly checking things (e.g., locks, appliances) to prevent harm
- Disturbing or forbidden thoughts, often about harm or taboo topics
- Excessive counting of objects, actions, or thoughts
- Repeating phrases or prayers mentally to reduce anxiety
- Difficulty discarding items, leading to clutter
- Intolerance of uncertainty, leading to excessive reassurance seeking
- High levels of anxiety and distress related to obsessions and compulsions
- Avoiding situations that trigger obsessions or compulsions

WAYS TO SUPPORT

If you suspect your child has OCD or is developing OCD tendencies, you should make an appointment with the GP. Treating OCD cannot be done without medical/professional support.

There are ways to support at home which may help (although these will not fully address the needs of your child):

- Provide a supportive environment and encourage gradual exposure to feared situations whilst providing support and reassurance. Empathise and focus on listening to them explain what it feels like for them
- Be patient. Remember that whilst the behaviour can be challenging for you or the family, they are also exhausting for your child and it is not something they can "Turn off" or just stop. They need professional support to manage their OCD and this won't be fixed straight away –it will be a gradual managing of their feelings to help the situation get better.
- Ask your child what kind of support they would like –this may be providing a distraction technique such as going for a walk or doing something together.
- Be prepared to listen and make time to discuss feelings. Some children find verbalising feelings difficult so this may be done through drawings, writing it down or a creative activity.
- Teach tolerance for imperfection and avoid accommodating rituals
- Set limits on checking behaviours, gradually reducing the frequency by using distraction techniques
- Provide a safe space to discuss these thoughts.
- Maintain a consistent daily schedule, use visual timetables, prepare for changes in advance
- Use praise and rewards to encourage desired behaviours, implement a reward system and be explicit in what rewards are given for (what behaviours are you pleased to have seen)
- Provide training for family members so that there is consistency and understanding from all involved and foster acceptance.

OTHER RESOURCES

<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/obsessive-compulsive-disorder-ocd/overview/>

<https://www.ocduk.org/>

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/obsessive-compulsive-disorder-ocd/about-ocd/>

