

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is a condition where people experience obsessions, compulsions, or both, that take up a lot of time, intrude on daily life, and are very stressful for the child and their family. **Obsessions** are unwanted thoughts or ideas that are hard to get rid of. These may include intrusive fear of contamination, harm, or losing things. **Compulsions** are behaviors that people feel they have to do, often to reduce an obsessive thought. These may include compulsive action to clean, order, count, or repeat.

Where does OCD come from?

OCD occurs in 2-3% of children and is more likely to occur when other family members have OCD. Symptoms start to appear in childhood or the early teen years.

OCD can be triggered by events where an uncomfortable thought gets “stuck” in a person’s mind.

How can I help my child?

Learn how to set limits: 

Families may change their schedules or rules to accommodate OCD. They may not go out to eat because of their child’s fear of certain foods, they may change their schedule, and they may do excessive amounts of washing because of their child’s fear of germs. They spend a lot of time reassuring their child that things are clean or safe. Parents don’t want to see their kids suffer but with OCD, accommodating and reassuring makes OCD stronger. So, learn to set limits and don’t allow your child’s OCD dictate what they do or what your family does.

Be part of treatment: 

Parents have an important role in therapy for OCD. Know the treatment goals and practice plans to help with homework between therapy sessions.

Praise the effort: 

Working through OCD may feel scary. Create rewards and use praise for your child’s practice.

How can I help myself?

Learn about OCD and how it’s treated: 

The more you understand, the more you can overcome it.

Talk back to OCD: 

Many people find it helpful to think about OCD as something separate from themselves that they don’t need to listen to or obey. They can think, “My OCD wants me to wash my hands 5 more times, but I do not have to do what OCD says. I can do what I want.”

Practice: 

OCD takes up a lot of time and energy. Getting rid of it takes time and energy also, but once it’s gone, you’ll have more time to do what You want.

Reward yourself: 

Set up rewards for yourself for putting in the hard practice.

How can a professional help me?

OCD is treatable. The best psychotherapy for OCD is called Exposure and Response Prevention, often combined with a type of medication called a Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor (SSRI).

Exposure and Response Prevention is similar to Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, and helps people learn to experience their obsessive thought without the compulsive behavior. It takes practice and support to quiet the obsessive thoughts and stop compulsions.