

How to support a young person who may have OCD

OCD stands for Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. Obsessions are thoughts, images or urges that are unwanted (they pop into your mind even though you don't want them to be there), they are repetitive (they go round and round in your mind), and they are upsetting. Compulsions are things that children, adolescents and adults do to try and reduce the distress they feel from their obsession or to prevent something bad from happening. It is considered a disorder when it interferes with life, causes distress and stops you doing things you want to do.

Signs and symptoms of OCD

Obsessions can include fears around:

- Being dirty or contaminated
- Something bad happening to someone
- Unwanted sexual thoughts
- Things needing to be even or symmetrical
- Needing to tell or confess information

Common compulsions include:

- Washing
- Checking
- Counting
- Arranging/ordering
- Trying to cancel out bad thoughts
- Asking people for reassurance
- Avoiding particular situations

Useful Resources

Websites:

- OCD-UK www.ocduk.org
- OCD Action www.ocdaction.org.uk
- Hampshire CAMHS:
www.hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk

Books:

- Can I tell you about OCD? – Amita Jassi
- What to do when your brain gets stuck – Dawn Huebner
- Breaking free from OCD – Sarah Robinson, Cynthia Turner, Jo Derisley & Isobel Heyman
- Touch and Go Joe - Joe Wells

Top tips on how to support a young person you have concerns may be experiencing OCD

Try to notice the OCD cycle for your child - Be curious and observant. What thoughts are they having? What compulsions are they doing? What are they avoiding?

Make OCD the problem, not your child - reinforce this message with your child. Externalising OCD such as giving it a nickname (agreed with your child - they need to be on board with this so you have a shared language that makes sense to them). Take time to understand the distress OCD causes, and no matter how frustrating offer kindness and patience.

Try to stop giving advice - for the most part children already know that OCD makes no sense and reminding the child that of this usually just makes them feel bad. Advice to "just stop it" has the same effect; no one hates OCD more than the child who has it.

Be a cheerleader for your child - you can help motivate your child as they begin to boss back OCD. By having a supportive and confident neutral attitude can be really useful during exposure tasks. This is a gradual process.

Learn all you can about OCD - there is lots of information and resources available from books to websites and support groups.

Be aware of parent accommodation of OCD - parents, family members and friends are often brought into the child's behaviours and become entangled in OCD's territory. It is important to identify ways OCD bosses you around, remember that these often come from places of love and not wanting to see your child distressed.

Be realistic with your goals and expectations especially if they do not align with your child's - you can only control what you do, not that of others. Remember to look after yourself and seek support when needed.

Please see your GP or school nurse for support who can refer you to appropriate services. You can also self-refer to child and adolescent mental health services via [CAMHS \(hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk\)](http://CAMHS(hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk)).



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