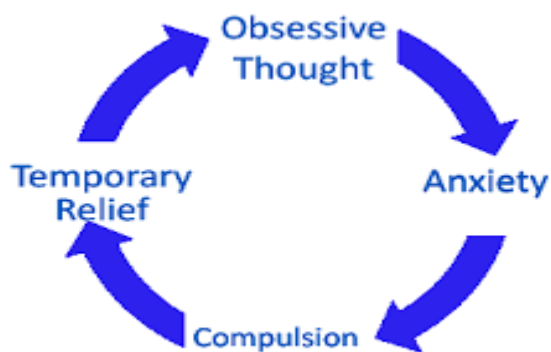


Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

What is OCD?

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is a mental health disorder rooted in anxiety that can start as early on as childhood. In fact, children as young as four years old can develop symptoms of OCD. People with OCD experience patterns of obsessions and compulsions. **Obsessions** are unwanted and repeating thoughts or images and **compulsions** are a strong urge or need to repeat certain behaviors or actions. Obsessions can lead to compulsions because completing a compulsion usually makes the stress or anxiety that the obsession causes feel better. When feeling stressed or anxious, OCD symptoms can change and become more difficult and when feeling relaxed and calm, symptoms can be less difficult. The cycle and pattern that these experiences create can cause strong emotions, be difficult to experience, get in the way of daily tasks, or change a person's lifestyle.



OCD Facts:

OCD most often appears between the ages of 8 and 12 years old.

On average, children live with OCD symptoms for 2.5 years before getting help.

About 3 million children and teens in the U.S. have OCD.

Signs and Symptoms of OCD

Common obsessions and compulsions include:

Obsessions:

- Fear of germs
- Fear of forgetting or losing something
- Wanting to have things exactly how you want them or in order
- Thoughts of hurting others
- Unpleasant or inappropriate thoughts

Compulsions:

- Cleaning or washing
 - Handwashing, cleaning the house/room, avoiding touching others, etc.
- Arranging or organizing
 - Organizing clothing by color, arranging toys so that they are the same, rewriting lists or assignments, etc.
- Counting
 - Counting steps, counting to a certain number, repeating actions such as touching a doorknob or looking at alarms a specific number of times, counting items, etc.
- Checking
 - Checking if the stove is off, doors are locked, faucet is not running, checking for mistakes, etc.
- Following the same strict routines each day
 - Difficulty with change or feeling as if you need things to be the way that you want them to be.

It is important to remember we are human, we all have habits, routines, urges, and repeating thoughts once in a while. If these thoughts or behaviors are happening very often and are becoming out of your control, causing you difficulty, or getting in the way of daily tasks such as schoolwork, chores, or fun activities, it may be time to ask for help



How to Manage OCD

- **Notice warning signs early on:** Seeing changes in your behavior and/or feeling more stressed and anxious can be important to understanding your OCD.
 - Common warning signs include big changes in routine, difficulty sleeping, wanting things the way that you want them, difficulty managing strong emotions, need for comfort, being unsure of yourself or having questions and/or concerns, repeating behaviors, etc.
- **Be patient with the process:** Working towards managing OCD and helping yourself feel better is not change that will happen overnight, be patient and kind with yourself and the process.
 - Notice the people around you who you can turn to for help and support such as friends or family members.
 - Remind yourself that making progress is a process and if you do not see change right away, that is okay! Keep working towards adding tools to your toolbox to manage OCD.
 - Recognize and celebrate progress! Progress is something to be proud of. Notice progress, no matter the size, is important.
- **Delaying compulsions:** Stopping yourself from acting on your urges and compulsions can be hard. Delaying compulsions can help you take steps towards stopping these behaviors.
 - Delaying your compulsions by noticing the urge and then giving yourself a timeline by telling yourself, “I will wait 2 minutes and then see how I feel” or “I will wait until after class and see how I feel”.
 - While delaying compulsions, be sure to use distractions such as calling a friend, listening to music, playing with toys, or reading a book to distract your mind from the urge to complete the compulsion.
 - It is okay to start off small and delay your compulsions for a minute or two. As time goes on and you are able to continue delaying your urges, delay the urge for a longer time and over time your urges may fade.
- **Find ways to relax and recharge:** OCD can be stressful, overwhelming, and tiring at times. It is important that as you take steps to manage your OCD, you also take care of yourself!
 - Finding the time to do things you enjoy such as watching your favorite TV show, going for a walk, playing with your favorite toy, practicing a hobby, getting active, or being creative, can help boost your mood and manage the stress that can come with OCD.
- **Practicing coping strategies to manage anxiety:** OCD is rooted in anxiety and adding tools to your toolbox to manage anxiety can be helpful to manage how your body, mind, and emotions react to OCD.
 - Deep breathing techniques: breathe in through your nose like you are smelling the flowers for 4 seconds, hold it for 4 seconds, breathe out through your mouth like you are blowing bubbles for 4 seconds, and rest for 4 seconds.

- Grounding techniques: Identify 5 things you can see, 4 things you can feel, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste.
- Journaling: Write or draw about worries, thoughts, fears, emotions, and experiences.
- Challenge anxious thoughts: When having worries about obsessions or compulsions, challenge your worries by being a worry detective and asking yourself, 'Why would that worry not come true?' or 'What evidence do I have against this worry?'
 - If you are worried about failing your math test if you do not touch your bedroom doorknob three times, be the detective against your anxious thoughts and ask yourself, "Why would that worry not come true?" Find all the evidence against your anxious thoughts.
- **Draw your OCD monster:** OCD can often feel like a bully or monster that is being mean to you at times.
 - Drawing what this bully or monster looks like can help you express yourself, conquer your fears, and understand your emotions by putting a face and image to your OCD.
- **It is okay to ask for help:** It can be hard at times to tell others how we are feeling or what is going on in our lives or in our minds. Speaking up and telling a parent or trusted adult about how you are feeling and what you are experiencing can help that adult connect you with the support you may need and add teammates to your team such as a counselor at school or your doctor to help you feel better.



Resources:

Recommended Reading for Children:

- “Repetitive Rhonda” by Jan Evans MA
- “Ten Turtles on Tuesday: A Story for Children About Obsessive Compulsive Disorder” by Ellen Flanagan Burns
- “What to do When Your Brain Gets Stuck: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming OCD” by Dawn Huebner, PhD
- “Mr. Worry: A Story About OCD” by Holly L. Niner
- “No One is Perfect and YOU Are a Great Kid” by Kim Hix
- “The ABC's of OCD!” by Kathleen Dunn
- “Up & Down the Worry Hill: A Children's Book about Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder and its Treatment” by Aureen P Wagner, PhD
- “Take Control of OCD: The Ultimate Guide for Kids With OCD” by Bonnie Zucker

References:

Adapted from:

International OCD Foundation (2024)

Child Mind Institute (2023)