

Resource Guide for Caregivers: Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

What is Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)?

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder is a mental health condition characterized by obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviors that cause distress and negatively impact a person's daily life. "Obsessions" are thoughts, urges, images, and preoccupations that are intrusive, and "compulsions" are the behaviors that people with OCD engage in order to alleviate their obsessive thoughts. People with OCD spend significant time managing these symptoms, feel that they *have* to perform these behaviors, and experience a high level of anxiety around navigating these symptoms in their daily life.

Symptoms of OCD:

OCD can look different for each person, but below are examples of some of the more common obsessions and compulsions that present with OCD.

Obsessions:	Compulsions:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Perfectionism or being fixated on something being exactly "right"• Preoccupation with something bad happening to self or others• Preoccupation with illness or exposure to germs• Scary or disturbing images• "Taboo" thoughts or preoccupation around violent or sexual imagery or impulses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Organizing things in a very specific order or manner• Checking things repetitively• Hand washing or repetitive behaviors around hygiene• Re-reading or re-writing things• Tapping or blinking in a repetitive pattern• Mental acts such as counting or repeating a word or phrase

Evidence-Based Treatment:

There is strong evidence that with treatment and support, children can dramatically reduce their OCD symptoms. When looking for a therapist on a site such as [psychologytoday.com](https://www.psychologytoday.com), look for a provider who has expertise in OCD and specializes in **Exposure & Response Therapy** or **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy**. These treatments are designed to change a person's patterns of thinking and to reduce anxiety through gradual exposure to a stressor. In addition to therapy, children may benefit from medication to reduce OCD symptoms.

What can caregivers do to support their child?

- **Educate yourself and your child** about OCD
- **Name the OCD** something like "the OCD Bully," and talk about it as something external to your child. This helps to align child and parent together on the same team fighting the OCD symptoms.

- Caregivers instinctively want to protect their child from something upsetting, but learning to confront and manage these stressors is vital for the treatment of OCD. With guidance from a therapist, caregivers can help their child to **face the stressor and practice resisting compulsions** over time.
- It is important that caregivers are non-shaming about OCD behaviors, but also that they **do not accommodate the obsessive compulsive behaviors** or structure family life to avoid OCD triggers.

Resources and Support:

- The **International OCD Foundation** website (iocdf.org) offers extensive information about OCD treatment and support. New Hampshire has a branch of IOCDF: (www.ocdnewhampshire.org). Search for online support groups and resources.
- IOCDF also has a guide for **Managing OCD in your Household** - (<https://kids.iocdf.org/for-parents/managing-ocd-in-your-household/>)
- The Child Mind Institute has a guide for **Parent's Role in OCD Treatment** - (<https://childmind.org/article/kids-and-ocd-the-parents-role-in-treatment/>)
- **Vermont Family Network** provides information about resources statewide and they offer a "Parent Match" program where they match a caregiver 1:1 with another caregiver who has navigated a similar diagnosis. (www.vermontfamilynetwork.org)
- There are also many guides and workbooks for children and teens available including:
 - [The OCD Workbook for Kids: Skills to Help Children Manage Obsessive Thoughts and Compulsive Behaviors](#): by Anthony Puliafico, PhD & Joana Robin PhD
 - [Standing Up to OCD Workbook for Kids](#): by Tyson Reuter PhD
 - [What to Do when Your Brain Gets Stuck: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming OCD](#): by Dawn Heubner
 - [The OCD Workbook for Teens: Mindfulness and CBT Skills to Help You Overcome Unwanted Thoughts and Compulsions](#): by Jon Hershfield MFT

Adapted from:

American Psychiatric Association. (n.d.). What is obsessive-compulsive disorder?
<https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/obsessive-compulsive-disorder/what-is-obsessive-compulsive-disorder>

What is OCD? International OCD Foundation. <https://iocdf.org/about-ocd/>

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