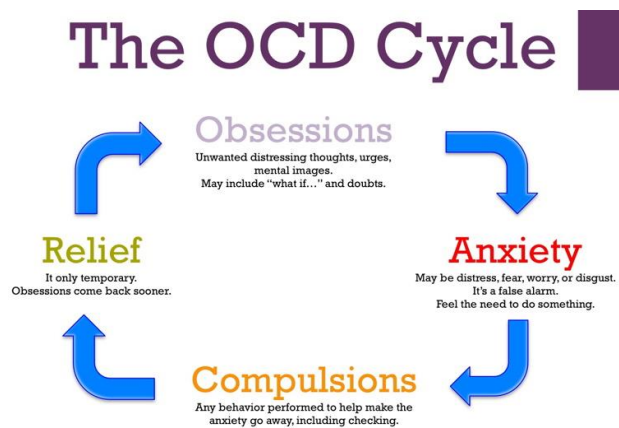


# Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

## What is it?

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is a type of anxiety disorder that causes a child to be stuck in a cycle of distressing thoughts (obsessions), and as a result need to carry out rituals or habits (compulsions). These compulsions may temporarily make the child feel better. However, this is usually short-lived. Some obsessive thoughts and behaviours may have limited impact on functioning and be part of normal development and/or response to stress. To be diagnosed as OCD, obsessions and compulsions must cause distress and interfere with everyday life. The focus of OCD can vary, but may include dirt/contamination, danger, or specific time-conscious actions.



According to OCD UK, the onset of OCD varies across a range of ages, with some children as young as six developing the disorder. OCD UK reports that 25% of cases begin by age 14, and symptoms tend to become problematic during late adolescence in men and early adulthood in women (OCD UK).

## Signs and Symptoms

OCD symptoms can be divided into obsessions and compulsions. Examples include:

### Common OCD symptoms in children

#### Obsessions

- ☞ Contamination themes
- ☞ Harm to self or others
- ☞ Aggressive themes
- ☞ Sexual themes
- ☞ Scrupulosity/religiosity
- ☞ Forbidden thoughts
- ☞ Symmetry urges
- ☞ Need to tell, ask, confess

#### Compulsions

- ☞ Washing or cleaning
- ☞ Repeating
- ☞ Checking
- ☞ Touching
- ☞ Counting
- ☞ Ordering/arranging
- ☞ Hoarding
- ☞ Praying

OCD can appear different in different people, but some examples include:

- Having to do something multiple times (e.g. turning lights on and off)
- Repetitive hand-washing, or avoiding dirt
- Distress if not able to complete rituals – rituals can be mental or physical
- The need for everything to be 'just right' (chair at certain angle, colours in a certain pot)
- Worrying that something bad is going to happen

## Suggestions for Schools

If you are concerned that a child might have OCD, it would be helpful to speak to their parent(s) and encourage them to visit the GP. The GP will be able to refer the child to appropriate mental health services.

However, there are some things you can do to help manage the distress of pupils.

- **Communicate with the child:** Let them know that you are here to help and reassure them that if they want to talk to anyone at any time, this is okay. Often, children with OCD will hide their obsessive thoughts for fear of someone not understanding. If you are able to provide a safe space where they can talk freely and without judgment, they may find it easier to manage the compulsions.
- **Support with coping skills:** Try to support the child with coping techniques that might help to manage their anxiety. Breathing exercises and muscle relaxation can be useful.
- **Be aware of triggers:** Knowing what the child's OCD is focused on can help you to be aware of potential triggers. For example, if the child's OCD centres around dirt and contamination, paying close attention during forest schools may help you to notice if distress is becoming too much. It may be helpful to ask the child if they are okay or need some time out.
- **Praise task success:** Provide children with appropriate praise for successfully completed tasks and positive behaviour. Try to ignore frequent requests for reassurance.
- **Model acceptance of mistakes:** It can be helpful to model to children the acceptance of mistakes in class. This can help children to manage their anxiety around mistakes, and to understand that we all make mistakes and it is okay to ask for help.
- **Extra time for work/tests:** Children with OCD may find it difficult to concentrate and may need extra time to complete work. Doing this can help reduce anxiety and improve focus.
- **Break down complex tasks:** Breaking down complex tasks into smaller steps can help children to feel less overwhelmed. Provide estimates for expected task completion time.
- **Notify in advance of any upcoming changes to routine:** Children may struggle with a change in routine. If a child has OCD, they may find this particularly overwhelming. Changes to routine can cause them to resort back to their obsession/compulsion behaviours in order to feel safe.

## Useful websites / Resources



Further information and examples of different types of OCD

<https://childmind.org/guide/a-teachers-guide-to-ocd-in-the-classroom/>

Examples of obsessive and compulsive behaviours and how they may present

<https://adaa.org/understanding-anxiety/obsessive-compulsive-disorder/ocd-at-school>

Research paper on OCD in the classroom including useful strategies

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249832670\\_Teaching\\_Students\\_With\\_Obsessive-Compulsive\\_Disorder](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249832670_Teaching_Students_With_Obsessive-Compulsive_Disorder)

NHS Self Help Booklet

<https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Obsessive-Compulsive-Disorder-A-young-persons-self-help-guide.pdf>

NHS Parent/Carer Guidance Booklet

<https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Helping-your-child-with-Obsessive-Compulsive-Disorder.pdf>

This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg