

Child and Adolescent Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder



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Obsessive-compulsive disorder is an anxiety disorder characterized by thoughts, ideas, urges, or worries that run through one's mind (obsessions) and repeating behaviors (compulsions). Although people with OCD may know that their thoughts and behavior do not make sense, they are often unable to stop them.

Symptoms can begin during childhood, the teenage years or young adulthood. On average, one million children and adolescents in the United States are diagnosed with OCD, some as young as three or four.

What are the symptoms?

- Experiencing obsessions, some of the most common obsessions are:
 - Fear of serious illness
 - Focus on lucky or unlucky numbers
 - Fear of danger to self and others
 - Extreme self-doubt
 - Demand for things to be even, equal, or exact.
- Experiencing compulsions, some of the most common compulsions are:
 - Rituals around washing hands or cleaning
 - Touching, counting, arranging, or organizing objects.
 - Repeating information or daily habits.
 - Hoarding objects.
- Difficulties in school. Children or adolescents may often:
 - Have late or incomplete homework assignments
 - Avoid participating in class
 - Have difficulty focusing in class
- Embarrassment or hiding rituals from others.
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How does child and adolescent OCD affect families?

Parents can feel bewildered by their child's behaviors and may feel they are "just a phase." There may be periods of frustration and anger when children repeatedly demand answers to questions or want help in completing their rituals. Parents of children with OCD may feel guilty if they find that the disorder has run in their families. However, OCD is **not** caused by bad parenting.

Other children in the family may feel neglected while parents focus on helping the child with OCD. Siblings may also be subject to teasing by friends who do not understand OCD.

What are the causes?

The exact cause of OCD is unknown. Researchers believe that activity in parts of the brain is responsible. The brain may respond differently to certain chemicals that allow for communication to happen inside the brain. Some factors that may cause OCD are:

- **Additional Diagnoses.** Children who experience motor tics and/or Tourette's syndrome often develop OCD as well.
- **Family history.** OCD can run in families.

Diagnosis

A child psychiatrist will need to review the child's behavior and use a specially designed interview to diagnose OCD.

Teachers can be very helpful in recognizing sign of OCD. They can also be helpful in supporting a child's treatment of OCD. Even if a child's OCD is not active at school, teachers should be informed that treatment for OCD can improve the child's ability to learn.

Treatment

Treatment for OCD includes medication therapy, behavior therapy, or a combination of both. Medical professional should be contacted to recommend which treatment plan is best for each child/adolescent.

Where can Parents/Guardians Turn for Help?

- NAMI National
 - <https://www.nami.org/home>
 - 651-439-3800
- NAMI Minnesota
 - <https://namimn.org/>
 - 651-645-2948
- International Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder Foundation
 - <https://iocdf.org/>
 - 617-973-5801
- American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry
 - <https://www.aacap.org/>
 - 202-966-7300