



At School



OCD GUIDE

FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

WHAT IS THIS GUIDE ALL ABOUT?

"I know all about OCD. It can be terrifying to overcome and you feel like everything is a battle. You've got to remember though that it's not your fault and you can do something about it.

This guide explains a little more about OCD and some of the ways that you can deal with it at school. You can find more on our website and even chat online with others. So get on to www.ocdaction.org.uk/school. See you there." - Tom (year 9)

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it's time to act

SO WHAT IS OBSESSIVE-COMPULSIVE DISORDER (OCD)?

OCD is an anxiety problem. It is a bit different from other sorts of anxiety because you get troubled by particular sorts of annoying thoughts and behaviours. You get thoughts that keep popping into your mind when you don't want them to. They are upsetting and unpleasant. Sometimes they can be like horrid pictures in your mind. Sometimes they are a feeling that you have or haven't done something (doubts), or a weird feeling that you might do something you don't want to do (urges). All of these are called obsessions. That is the 'O' in OCD!

As well as obsessions you find yourself doing annoying behaviours or habits over and over again, for example washing when you aren't really dirty or tapping things you don't really want to do and things that don't make sense. These habits are compulsions, the 'C' in OCD. The habits sometimes happen inside your head, for example making yourself count to a certain number or thinking a good thought to cancel out a bad thought.

Obsessions and compulsions can begin to take up lots of time in your life, make you sad and angry, and stop you doing the things you enjoy and need to do.

Some common obsessions are:

- Fears about dirt or germs
- Worries about bad things happening
- Unwanted sexual thoughts
- Thoughts about doing something forbidden or embarrassing
- Discomfort if things are not symmetrical or even
- Needing to tell, ask or confess
- Fears of losing important things
- Asking whether things are 'all right' (seeking reassurance)

Some common compulsions are:

- Checking things over and over again
- Touching or tapping things
- Seeking reassurance
- Hoarding or collecting things that are useless
- Arranging things so that they are 'just right'
- Washing and cleaning
- Counting, repeating and re-doing things

HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE OCD

Everyone has annoying thoughts - ideas, worries, urges and images that they find upsetting or do not make sense to them. This is absolutely normal. Just having unwanted thoughts does not mean you have OCD. Most people just ignore these thoughts and get on with their lives. It is also very common for people to repeat certain actions, such as double-checking whether they have locked their front door before they go out.

People with OCD find it very hard to ignore the thoughts that they are experiencing and pay lots of attention to them. The thoughts then seem very important, get more frequent, and more distressing. The harder you try not to have them the worse they seem to get! Often compulsions increase too so that they take up a huge amount of time and effort.

If you think that you may have OCD you should get some help. It is hard to deal with on your own. Usually, if you see a doctor and they think that your obsessions and compulsions are having a big impact on your life they will ask you to see a specialist. The specialist may then diagnose you as having OCD and tell you about how you can tackle it. There are treatments that have been proven to work and have made lots of people able to get in control of their lives.

HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE OCD?

It is pretty hard to calculate exactly how many people have OCD but it is estimated that around 1-2% of people in the UK have it. That means in your school, for every hundred pupils, one or two of them have OCD.



Fighting OCD can be challenging so getting people on your side can make a massive difference and help you to feel that you are not facing it alone.

DO I HAVE TO TELL ANYONE IF I HAVE BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH OCD?

Life can be hard enough at school as it is and having to deal with OCD can make life even more difficult. So you may wonder if you should talk to your friends or parents about your OCD. If you can pluck up the courage to let people know, sometimes it's helpful to tell a trusted friend.

Fighting OCD can be challenging so getting people on your side can make a massive difference and help you to feel that you are not facing it alone. But it's really your choice and there is no right or wrong answer as each person is different.

Some of your friends or family members may not know about or understand OCD, so you may have to tell them what it is and how it affects you. You might find that talking about it with them helps you or might feel that it's something personal which you don't feel comfortable sharing right now, so whatever you decide is up to you.

DOES MY SCHOOL NEED TO KNOW I HAVE OCD?

School or college takes up most of your day and OCD doesn't just stop at the school gate. You may find that it affects your school work especially in stressful situations like an exam or a new term. You may find that some of the many areas that may be difficult for you right now are learning, remembering things, solving problems and concentrating. You may also find it hard to focus and understand your work.

It can be helpful to have someone such as a school nurse or counsellor to talk to when you're struggling with OCD, and it can also really help if your teachers are aware of how OCD affects you.

WHAT CAN MY SCHOOL DO?

If your teachers know about your OCD they can make some small changes that will make you feel more comfortable, help you study and make it easier for you to fit into the school community. It is important that when you are fighting your OCD your teachers know this, so they can help



Make sure that your teacher has our special info sheet. We can send it to them or they can download it from

www.ocdaction.org.uk/school

you not to give in to it. We have a special guide that we can give to your teachers with some advice and tips for helping you in the classroom. It is also important for you to know about these and remind your teacher if needed.

- If you do decide to inform your school about your OCD then it is important that you keep them up to date. This can be done at parent / teacher meetings or through letters. We have suggested that it may be helpful to use a 'concerns book', an OCD diary or monitoring form (see Appendix 2) which you can pass to your parents and teachers to make sure that everyone knows what's going on and that you are getting the help you need.
- There may be times when you experience a lot of worry in the classroom so we recommend that you ask for extra support during these situations. It is usually best to try to stay in an anxiety provoking situation until the anxiety goes away (which it always will!), but while you are learning this you might need some short breaks.
- It may be helpful if you discuss things like where you are comfortable sitting in the classroom with your teacher so that they can make the appropriate arrangements before the lesson starts.
- If you are having difficulty with handing in coursework or essays, you could explain to your teacher your difficulties and ask for the option of submitting your work at a later date.
- If you need more time to complete your work when you are doing an exam it may be useful to discuss this with your teachers. You may be eligible for 'special consideration' from the examination boards at GCSE level and 'A' level. To do this you should ask your GP or mental health professional to write a letter explaining how OCD is affecting you. For more information on this speak with your form tutor or exams officer.

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MY STORY

At the age of ten I began doing some strange behaviour like counting steps over and over in my head. My family and I referred to them as my 'habits'. They didn't really bother me too much until I was sixteen - when things took a turn for the worse. For example, if I thought of something bad happening to me when reading I would feel compelled to reread that section four times. Also, I would touch objects like door handles in a certain pattern. I feared that terrible harm would come to me if I didn't do these things. Several hours of my day were taken up, meaning I didn't have much time for going out with mates or completing school work.

Eventually I spoke to my GP about it and was diagnosed with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. It felt like a huge weight had been lifted from my shoulders! Soon after, I began receiving Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT). But the process of learning to deal with OCD wasn't going to happen overnight, and unfortunately I didn't get the 'A' level grades I wanted.

It wasn't until my first year at university that I was able to fully manage my OCD. Now I rarely feel the need to give in to compulsions. I have a nice group of friends and last year I finished 2nd in my class at university. My advice to those affected by OCD is to start dealing with it as soon as possible – so you can learn to manage it sooner. - *Joshua*

WHERE ELSE CAN I FIND INFORMATION ABOUT OCD?

For more information on OCD and young people, refer to the

- OCD at School Guide for School Personnel
- OCD at School Guide for Parents
- www.ocdaction.org.uk/school



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