

Supporting Someone with OCD or a Related Condition

If someone you love or care for is struggling with OCD or a related condition, your support can make a big difference in their life and can help them get a better understanding of what they're going through and how they can get the right help. We understand however that supporting your loved one can feel like a difficult and distressing experience at times. These conditions are incredibly debilitating, so individuals struggling with these conditions will be helped immensely by having a supportive, understanding, and empathetic family and social network.

The pointers below may be helpful in outlining how you can support someone with OCD or a related condition throughout their journey:

➤ **Psychoeducation**

Often times it can feel difficult for someone to understand or empathise with an experience that they don't know much about and one that they are not struggling with themselves. By learning more about OCD or a related condition and how it works, this can help clarify areas of confusion or frustration around why your loved one is getting distressed by intrusive thoughts or obsession themes and then engaging in compulsions that don't seem rational to you and others. Psychoeducation around OCD or a related condition can also help de-bunk some myths by clarifying that:

- Symptoms within these conditions are not personality traits or part of 'quirky' behaviour.
- People with OCD or a related condition are not trying to be difficult or trying to seek attention.
- Rationalisation around why compulsions don't need to be carried out does not make symptoms go away as the OCD cycle does not use logic or rationality to keep it going.
- OCD or a related condition will not go away on its own once the individual has 'grown out of it' or 'snapped out of it'.
- OCD and related conditions are very treatable.

Learning more about OCD or a related condition may involve getting in touch with OCD Action's Helpline, reading online resources and recommended books, or joining a support groups for carers. You can read more about [OCD and how it works](#) here.

➤ **Being Open and Acknowledging That Their Experience is Real**

Due to the nature of OCD and related conditions, individuals struggling with these can feel ashamed or embarrassed by their mental health experiences and often work very hard to hide them from others. By being open about the condition your loved one is struggling with and acknowledging that it exists and that it is real, this can help remove stigma and support your loved one to not feel so isolated in their experience and to feel seen by you. This may involve sharing some psychoeducation you have learned yourself, and asking them about their experience and listening in a non-judgemental and empathetic way, as each individual's experience is unique and personal to them.

➤ **Creating a Supportive, Empathetic Environment**

There are many ways to create a supportive, empathetic environment for your loved one, and quite often this involves listening to them about their experience with openness and empathy, refraining from judgement and blame, and staying alongside them throughout their journey. A few things to consider may be:

- Remaining patient, even when this feels difficult
- Modifying expectations
- Avoiding comparisons with other people or day-to-day
- Recognising any improvements, even if they feel small or aren't consistent
- Encouraging and supporting your loved one to get help and challenge their OCD or related condition without being pushy

➤ **Encouraging Your Loved One to Access Treatment and Support**

The most effective way to tackle OCD head-on and long-term is to access the recommended treatments for it, and many individuals struggling with OCD or a related condition are receptive to this and open to trying. However, there are many people who are reluctant or resistant to getting treatment and support. OCD and related conditions create a false of security in how their cycles work, and it is often very frightening for someone struggling with these conditions to let go of this cycle as it means accepting that they will have to let go of what they do to feel safe. Even though many individuals struggling with OCD or a related condition have some level of insight into how irrational the cycle is, it is common for them to feel that they are better off living with it rather than challenging it. This can be difficult for carers and family members to sit with and understand, and can sometimes be misunderstood as the individual being difficult or unreasonable, though this is of course not the case. When and if appropriate, it may be helpful to empathetically describe to your loved one the impact that their OCD or related condition is having on you and others. This discussion point does need to be approached very sensitively as individuals struggling with these conditions are often already feeling a lot of shame and guilt around how they may impact others. You may also find it helpful to visualise with your loved one how life would look and feel without the OCD or related condition in a hopeful way.

As upsetting as it may be to see someone struggling with OCD or a related condition not wanting to seek support and treatment, it is essentially their individual choice whether they seek help or not. However, this doesn't mean that there aren't ways to empathetically and gently encourage them to get the right help, and often times this involves providing stepping stones for them before they can engage in going out and getting treatment. Some suggestions may be:

- Providing them with psychoeducation around their condition and showing them that you understand and that you care
- Helping to remove the stigma around talking about their condition by being open about it and acknowledging it in a sensitive way
- Encouraging them to get in touch with OCD Action's Helpline, which they can contact completely anonymously if they choose and will be able to speak with someone who understands OCD and related conditions and will provide them a safe, confidential, and non-judgemental space to talk about how they're feeling and what their options are
- Encouraging them to join a support group

Once your loved one has started treatment, remember to continue encouraging them throughout the process so they feel empowered in their progress, even if improvements are small and inconsistent. Symptoms may wax and wane, and some days your loved one may be able to deal with symptoms better than others. Each person will go through their treatment journey at their own pace, and sometimes this may be a lengthy process.

➤ **Recognising Triggers and Monitoring Symptoms**

Recognising things that trigger your loved one's OCD or related condition or make it worse can help to create more clarity around their experience and help them and yourself identify what these triggers are so you both don't feel as helpless or powerless in the moment. Monitoring symptoms of OCD or a related condition can be very helpful as well in keeping an eye on your loved one's progress or worsening of symptoms, so that you can help them identify when they are really struggling and need extra support.

➤ **Setting Limitations with Empathy**

Drawing a line or setting limitations empathetically can sometimes be one of the most difficult things to do as a parent, carer, partner, family member, or friend. You may quite often find yourself being drawn into engaging with or performing compulsions for your loved one because of the distress they feel or because sometimes this just keeps life moving when there are lots of other things to juggle. This can often times feel like a double-edged sword as engaging in compulsions feeds the cycle and ultimately doesn't reduce the individual's symptoms, which can bring up feelings of guilt and shame. Psychoeducation and OCD-specific support for carers from healthcare professionals is key here, as this knowledge can help inform how you can set boundaries with your loved one using the right language and energy. The [NICE OCD and BDD Treatment Guidelines](#) are very clear about how mental health professionals and services offering treatment to individuals with OCD or BDD should involve carers and family members as much as possible and form a working alliance with them.

➤ **Maintaining Clear Family Communication and a 'Normal' Family Routine**

OCD and related conditions are tough on both the individuals struggling with these conditions as well as on those who care for them. If you are part of a family unit, it's important to continue communicating with each other as a family and being consistent around support and empathetic limitations. This may also involve sharing carer responsibilities so that it doesn't become one person's full-time role in the house. Though this may feel very challenging and impossible at times, trying to maintain as 'normal' a family routine as possible can be very helpful in not allowing the OCD or related condition to dominate the household. A key part of this is remembering that **your loved one is not just their condition**, which can be difficult to remember at times particularly when the OCD or related condition is severely distressing and debilitating. As a family, this may involve doing family-type activities together like going for a walk, watching a movie, playing a game, or having dinner together.

➤ **Taking Care of Yourself**

If you are caring for or living with someone with OCD or a related condition, sometimes you may feel that your needs aren't important or cannot be met because they are not a priority compared with your loved ones' needs. It's key to remember that **you matter too**, and that you are entitled to support, help, and having your needs met, even when this feels impossible at times. Some self-care tips you can try include trying to find some time and space for yourself to go on a walk, see a friend, and engage in some hobbies

outside the house so you can have some time on your own to unwind and do the things you enjoy. If there is another adult in the household who can support your loved one, it may be helpful to try and split the caring role with them so you can each get some time to be on your own and do the things you want to do. Sometimes it is not possible to be physically apart from your loved one because of their OCD or related condition and you may not have another person around who can help you support them, and this makes things much more difficult. It can still help to try and find small things you enjoy doing even during these times which may include listening to music, watching a film, or speaking to someone over the phone. You can also get in touch with OCD Action's Helpline, join a support group, or look into getting a carer's assessment, which you can read more about on our factsheet [Support for Carers and Families](#).

*If you or your loved one would like further information about OCD or a related condition and what support and help is out there, you can contact the OCD Action Helpline on support@ocdaction.org.uk, **0300 6365478**, or visit our website at www.ocdaction.org.uk.*