

Talking to Your Loved One About Accessing Treatment for Their OCD or Related Condition

A significant number of people contact OCD Action because they are concerned about a loved one who is struggling with OCD or a related condition and want to help them access the right treatment and support. Many people struggling with these conditions are open to getting the right help and treating their symptoms, and many are reluctant or resistant to do so.

This is because OCD and related conditions create a false sense of security in how their cycles work, and the individual struggling feels that they are safer sticking with what they are doing rather than challenging it. For a lot of people struggling with severe symptoms, tackling their OCD or related condition can feel like a complete dismantling of this 'safety' system and this can be extremely frightening. This is unfortunately how OCD and related conditions work.

Often times parents, carers, family members and friends don't know how to raise the subject of getting help with their loved or are concerned about their loved one being reluctant or refusing to engage with treatment. If you are concerned about someone and are keen to get them the right help, there are a few things you can do to introduce the idea and start a conversation with them around this.

➤ Learn More about Their Condition and How it Impacts Them

Knowledge is power, and learning more about how exactly OCD or a related condition works can soften the confusion, misunderstanding, and anxiety that may be felt around why your loved one is so distressed by their intrusive thoughts and carrying out compulsions. It's also important to remember that every individual with OCD or a related condition is different and the way their condition impacts them specifically will vary based on who they are and their needs, so it's important to learn from your loved one how their specific symptoms impact them and what it's like living with this experience from their perspective. This can help your loved one to feel seen and heard and empower them to describe their internal world to you without you making assumptions first. Learning more about your loved one's condition and how it impacts them is key in understanding why the recommended treatments for OCD and related conditions are what they are, as they are designed to directly tackle these cycles.

➤ Learn More about the Recommended Treatments

Once you have developed a sound knowledge base around how OCD or a related condition works, it can become easier to understand the recommended treatments and why they are recommended. The two recommended treatments for OCD and related conditions are Cognitive Behavioural Therapy with Exposure and Response Prevention (CBT with ERP) and anti-obsessional medication. The ERP component of therapy

is absolutely vital in the treatment of OCD and related conditions, and involves the individual choosing intentionally to expose themselves to things that may trigger their intrusive thoughts or obsessional themes, and then choosing not to perform the compulsion they would usually perform. By doing this gradually and gently over time with the support of a qualified therapist, the brain re-learns how to sit with anxiety and uncertainty and develop resilience in the face of this, making the OCD loop less 'sticky'.

➤ **Share the Knowledge You've Learned with Your Loved One**

This can often times be the tricky part, as you may not know how to bring up this subject or may feel that your loved one will become distressed or defensive. Some pointers worth considering are:

- *Tone*

Staying calm, speaking clearly, remaining empathetic and non-judgmental, and giving your loved one lots of processing time and space can be helpful tips here.

- *Timing*

Finding the right time to speak to your loved one, whether this is a specific time of day or a particular moment when your loved one is feeling more receptive, can make a big difference. This will work better than trying to rush it or picking a time that works for you but not necessarily for them.

- *Encouragement*

It can sometimes help to think of this sharing of information as encouragement rather than persuasion, as it is always your loved one's individual decision if they choose to pursue treatment and this is something they can't be forced to do.

- *Things You Might Want to Say*

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, though this often needs to be approached very sensitively as individuals struggling with these conditions are often already feeling huge amounts of shame, guilt, and anxiety around how they may impact others. Sometimes someone's OCD may specifically revolve around the impact they feel they have on others, so this discussion point may not always be helpful and would certainly need to be tailored appropriately to the moment and to the individual. You can also talk to your loved one about what life would look and feel like without the OCD or related condition. Supporting them in visualising a hopeful future can really help to set goals and have something to work towards.

➤ **Offer Your Loved One a Stepping Stone**

Because of the nature of how OCD and related conditions work, delving straight into accessing treatment can be extremely difficult for some people and impossible for others. For example, even seeing a GP, which is often the first step towards accessing treatment, can be a big and scary step for many people because of previous experiences they've had or because they have never spoken to an external person about their symptoms before. It may be appropriate in these cases to suggest a few stepped stones that your loved one could explore towards eventually getting the right help, as this can feel like a softer, less daunting approach.

A few examples of such stepping stones can be:

- Suggesting that they get in touch with OCD Action's Helpline, where they can email in or speak to one of our volunteers over the phone, completely anonymously if they choose to, and where they will be offered a safe, confidential, and non-judgemental space to talk about their experience and what help is out there
- Encouraging them to join a support group where they can speak with and listen to other people with similar experiences so they don't feel as isolated and alone
- Suggesting that they read helpful resources or recommended books around their condition to help them normalise their experience as being part of a recognised mental health condition that others struggle with too, and joining them in that reading as well
- Watching clips or videos with them around their condition or interviews with other people who struggle with the same condition, have accessed the recommended treatments, and felt an improvement in their symptoms
- Helping them put together some notes and resources that they can take to their GP appointment, and accompanying them to said appointment so they can feel supported and not alone

➤ **Modify Expectations and Accept That it May Take Time**

It is natural and understandable for carers, family members, partners and friends to feel disappointed, helpless, or even frustrated and angry with their loved one if they continue to be resistant to getting help or if conversations around accessing treatment don't go well. It's important however to find ways to support yourself around this without involving your loved one or making them feel responsible for the impact of this on you. We have lots of helpful tips of how you can find ways to help and support yourself in our factsheet [Support for Carers and Families](#) as it is absolutely vital that you as a carer don't neglect your own needs or forget that you matter as well. It may be that your loved one is so distressed and feeling so unwell that they are not ready to make a change just yet, and it might be that they need more time to process the idea. It's important to remain patient and to perhaps try again at a later time if appropriate, as your loved one may have had time to think it through and may be more receptive to talking about it then.

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.