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What is Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder? Try Not to Overthink It

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Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is an anxiety disorder characterized by uncontrollable and intense thoughts or rituals that are often recurrent and unwanted (obsessions). This disorder can interrupt a child's normal thoughts and cause them to have increased fears, doubts, and worries. These obsessive thoughts can be very upsetting and even scary, leaving a child to feel powerless to stop focusing on them. Children with OCD are often diagnosed with other disorders including depression, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and other anxiety disorders.



How Common is OCD?

- OCD is more common in females than males.
- About 2.3% of the U.S. population ages 18-54 – approximately 3.3 million Americans – has OCD in a given year.
- OCD typically begins during adolescence or early childhood; at least one-third of the cases of adult OCD began in childhood.



Signs and Symptoms of OCD

- Excessive worry (about everything from germs to death)
- Extreme fears about something bad happening
- Feeling that things have to be exactly as the child believes they should be
- Having disturbing, unwelcome thoughts or images about hurting others
- Children may feel a strong compulsion to wash or clean, check that all electrical appliances or lights are off, rearranging things until they are just right, mental compulsions, repeated apologies, strong superstitions, constantly asking for reassurance, etc.



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Children with OCD feel compelled to do specific rituals to get relief from obsessive and compulsive behavior. Performing these rituals can give them a temporary relief from fear, worry, or bad thoughts. However, the more they do a ritual, the more they have the urge to do it again. Eventually, the ritual fails to bring as much relief as it once did. This causes them to perform the ritual repeatedly, which is also known as “getting stuck.” By being stuck, a child is then missing bedtime, the bus, assignments that may be due, etc. This can leave the child, and parent, feeling frustrated, upset, and exhausted.



Things Parents Can Do to Help Their Child with OCD:

- Secure an accurate and complete diagnosis.
- Live with OCD in the family by using effective parenting techniques, building support systems, and handling difficult issues.
- Explore therapy and other interventions, such as cognitive therapy.
- Understand the special education system completely if your child qualifies for services.
- Find resources through school counselors, therapist, doctors, etc.

OCD is a condition that is treatable with prompt and consistent intervention. Many people learn to live with OCD by learning how to overcome their compulsions and subsequently enjoy a happy and successful life.

Resources:

Obsessive – Compulsive Disorder. (2017, April 7). Retrieved from <http://kidshealth.org/en/parents/ocd.html>

Parenting Today Staff (2016, February 15). What Parents Need to Know About OCD in Children. Retrieved from <https://childdevelopmentinfo.com>

Childhood Obsessive – Compulsive Disorder. (2017, April 7). Retrieved from Child Development Institute, <https://childdevelopmentinfo.com>

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