

When Someone You Love Has OCD

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) affects millions of people in the U.S. and around the world. If one of those people is someone you love, you know that the impact of OCD reaches far beyond the person who has been diagnosed with this disorder.

Much has been written about OCD and its treatment. Much less has been written about the spouses, families, and friends who must watch a loved one suffer, and who must also live with the effects of the disorder every day. In an article on families of OCD sufferers, Heidi and Alec Pollard, two experts in the field of OCD, state: "OCD is a family affair. The toxic tentacles of this disorder extend far beyond its identified victim." This section of our website is a guide for you. It was written to help you help your loved one gain control over OCD, restore relationships that have been strained by the demands and heartbreak of this disorder and help you get the help you most likely need.

Steps To A Better Life

Life with a person who has OCD is filled with conflicting emotions. If you feel frustrated, angry, overwhelmed or hopeless, you are not alone. Today, there are new and more effective coping strategies for dealing with OCD-related difficulties. Families and friends can now take advantage of various "tools" that are effective in improving interactions between you and the OCD sufferer, and, at the same time, can help him or her succeed in the treatment process. Very importantly, when you interact with and/or provide care to an individual with OCD, you must take care of your own physical and emotional well-being.

First Things First

Some very important steps to help your loved one begin with you:

Learn about OCD

You will need to understand what your loved one goes through with this frequently debilitating disorder. We recommend you visit the OCD Facts, Individuals, or Parents section of this website for more information about:

What OCD is

You can access the OCD Facts, Individuals and Parents sections through the Home page of this website, or through these links:

Go to OCD Facts section

Become a Catalyst for Change

We urge you to follow these guidelines:

Help your loved one find appropriate treatment for OCD and encourage him or her to actively participate in the therapy process. Effective treatment is the most important step in gaining relief. Stop enabling OCD in your household or in your relationship. Participating in rituals with your loved one or accommodating avoidance behavior actually does not help. In fact, the effect can be just the opposite.

Try to establish a positive emotional climate in the home. How you communicate with your loved one as well as the level of support you provide cannot be overemphasized.

If this sounds easier said than done, we understand your skepticism. Beyond OCD's mission is to help people with OCD get relief, help their families and friends develop the key skills to become agents of change and help initiate dramatic improvements for everyone in the life of an OCD sufferer. The following sections will help you get started:

Take Care of Yourself

Before an airplane ever leaves the ground, flight attendants provide important instructions about what to do in an emergency. One of those instructions is particularly noteworthy: Put on your own oxygen mask before trying to help anyone else. The basic message is that unless you first take care of yourself, you won't be able to help others. Yet this fundamental idea is frequently ignored by family members of individuals with OCD. And even though research has indicated that family members report some – if not severe – distress adjusting to OCD, they seldom seek the professional help they need. Instead, they usually focus on the individual with OCD.

In their article on family members of OCD sufferers, Heidi and Alec Pollard list six family help-seeking myths and the fallacies behind them.

1. Myth: The only way for my life to improve is if the person with OCD gets better.

Fallacy: Although life will almost certainly be better for family members if the person with OCD gets better, there are no guarantees that he or she will. You need to do whatever you can to improve the quality of your own life, even if the OCD sufferer does not recover.

2. Myth: It's selfish to try to help myself.

Fallacy: This myth implies that it's inconsiderate to be concerned about your own well-being and that helping yourself is somehow harmful to other people. In reality, when you take care of yourself, you are in a much better position to help others.

3. Myth: Getting help for me will jeopardize my efforts to help the person with OCD.

Fallacy: When you're less overwhelmed by frustration, guilt, and other negative emotions, you are in a better state of mind and will actually be more effective in helping your loved one.

4. Myth: The person with OCD will get upset if I get help.

Fallacy: There actually is a very good chance that the person with OCD will become angry if you seek help. But the fallacies lie with the underlying assumptions of this myth:

(a) You can control whether or not the person with OCD gets upset (you can't).

(b) The person with OCD won't get upset if you don't get help (but he or she may get upset even if you don't get help; you can't control this).

5. Myth: I shouldn't have to be the one to change.

Fallacy: This myth is based on the laws of a world in which things are always fair. In the real world, you must make real decisions – even if they don't seem fair.

6. Myth: I should be able to cope without help.

Fallacy: Once again, this myth is based on a make-believe world in which you are all-knowing and never need help. In the real world, reasonable people seek help from others who have expertise or resources they don't have. In fact, knowing when to seek help is a strength, not a weakness.

The bottom line: Interacting with, and in some cases, caring for, a family member with OCD can be very stressful. To effectively help that person, you need to do whatever is necessary to take care of

your own physical and emotional well-being. That may mean talking with your loved one's cognitive behavior therapist for guidance or seeking help on your own. You may also want to consider attending a local OCD support group that is open to family members. Talking with others who have had similar experiences and learning about how they have approached family difficulties can be extremely helpful, if not therapeutic.

More Ways You Can Help Fight OCD

You can help bring information and education to people who have OCD and to the people who can make a difference in the quality of their lives — including family and friends, educators, clergy and the media.

How to Diagnose OCD

OCD is usually diagnosed after a series of medical tests and psychological exams. After a general exam, your doctor could send you to a specialist for further testing. Because many of the symptoms of OCD are similar to those of generalized anxiety disorder, schizophrenia or other mental illnesses, finding the correct diagnosis can be difficult. You can expect the tests and exams to include:

A physical exam to rule out any health problems

Blood tests to further rule out any problems and to screen for drugs and alcohol

In-depth psychological evaluation, including questions about symptoms

Talking to family and friends, if possible

In addition, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fifth edition (DSM-V), sets forth criteria that mental health professionals use to diagnose OCD.

How to Recognize OCD

Signs and symptoms of OCD may include:

Repeated thoughts or images, such as fear of dirt, disorder or germs

Intrusive sexual or violent thoughts, impulses or images

Repetitive rituals or behaviors, such as counting, cleaning or checking things

An inability to control such thoughts or behaviors

Behaviors are preformed not to derive pleasure, but to lessen the anxiety the thoughts are causing

Spending at least one hour a day performing the behaviors

Thoughts and behaviors impacting day-to-day life

Most people diagnosed with OCD experience both obsessions and compulsions. Some might only experience obsessions, and a smaller portion of sufferers might only experience compulsions. If you or a loved one is experiencing these symptoms, call to discuss the treatment options available to you. Our trained advisers are available 24/7 to assist you.

Steps You Can Take to Help Someone With OCD

The best thing a family member or friend can do for someone suffering from obsessive-compulsive disorder is to encourage and help that person to seek treatment. The person suffering from OCD might be embarrassed and try to hide symptoms or rituals, and mental rituals can be very difficult to recognize. Family members should be on the lookout for behavior changes and disruptions in everyday activities. Although loved ones might be tempted to help with rituals and behaviors, such as cleaning or checking door locks, this is counterproductive and reinforces the behaviors. A critical reaction to the behaviors can also increase anxiety for the person, so family members should strive to remain nonjudgmental and open-minded.

Family members will find it helpful to educate themselves about the disorder. Sufferers of OCD can be frustrating to deal with, and knowing more about the condition will increase the likelihood of those around them supporting and helping the sufferer. Once therapy has begun, supportive friends and family can make all the difference to recovery.

Talking to Someone With OCD

If someone you love is suffering from obsessive-compulsive disorder, you should try to maintain a calm and nonjudgmental approach. If your loved one is comfortable with talking about the disorder, listen carefully so you can better understand what they are going through. It helps to realize the behaviors are separate from the person, and expressing this will help make your loved one more comfortable in openly talking about the disorder. During treatment, acknowledging any progress made, no matter how small, can help your loved one to continue on the road to recovery.

The first step for any concerned family member should be to encourage the sufferer to seek treatment. We can help you explore treatment options for your loved one. Call today to discuss options.

Adolescents and Teens

According to the International OCD Foundation, at least one in every 200 adolescents and teens in the US is suffering from OCD. Obsessive-compulsive disorder in children or teenagers can affect every part of their lives, from school to home. Children with OCD are also more likely to suffer from other associated mental health disorders, such as anxiety disorder and depression.

Symptoms of OCD often first appear in childhood or adolescence, and they can change in focus or severity over time. Getting the affected child into treatment should be the first priority. Since children are in school for much of the time, school personnel should be aware of the signs and symptoms as well as any treatment your child is receiving.

Learning to Cope With OCD

Although coping with OCD can be difficult, you should know that ways exist to make it easier. Learning about your disorder can help you understand your symptoms and behaviors, making treatment plans easier to stick to and complete. Planning daily tasks and staying organized can also help you cope with your condition. Set recovery goals and stay focused on achieving them. Stay motivated by keeping track of your progress. Find healthy outlets, such as hobbies or athletics. Meditation or yoga can be helpful to manage stress and anxiety.

Additionally, support groups are available for those suffering from OCD. It can be helpful to meet and talk with others going through similar challenges. Over 2.2 million Americans suffer from OCD, so you shouldn't feel alone.

How to Treat OCD

Obsessive-compulsive disorder treatment can help sufferers bring symptoms under control. Obsessive-compulsive disorder can be treated with medication or psychotherapy; often a combination of both is most successful. Antidepressants, such as Zoloft or Paxil, are often the first medications tried in OCD cases, but other psychiatric medications might also be used. Sometimes, it can take trying many medications and dosages to find the right one or combination that works. It might take weeks or even months to notice a difference in symptoms after starting a new medication. The side effects should be discussed with your doctor before starting any new medication.

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) can be helpful in OCD cases. CBT teaches the sufferer how to retrain thought patterns so the compulsions will no longer be necessary. This therapy can be given individually, in groups or in a residential setting.

Deciding Between OCD Solutions

Choosing the OCD treatment that will work best for you is an important decision. Your mental health professional can help you to understand all your treatment options and work out a plan that fits your

lifestyle and specific needs. Each treatment option has pros and cons, and sometimes a combination of several treatment options is most effective. If you're ready to explore treatment options, call today. We are available 24/7 to help you.

Where to Find OCD Treatment for a Friend or Family Member

If your friend or family member is suffering from obsessive-compulsive disorder symptoms, the first step is to encourage them to discuss the problem with a family doctor or qualified mental health professional. OCD is a treatable disease. If left untreated, OCD can have devastating effects on day-to-day functioning.

If you have a loved one who is showing signs and symptoms of OCD, call today. We can help you find treatment options and choose the best way to deal with this condition.

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder Symptoms, Causes and Effects

Morgan Adams in Obsessive-Compulsive (OCD)

Obsessive-compulsive disorder, or OCD, is an anxiety disorder that generally causes extreme discomfort. Sufferers are often riddled with persistent and recurrent impulses, thoughts and images that are unwanted. According to the National Institute for Mental Health, OCD affects more than 2 million adults in the United States. Severe cases of OCD can cause an extreme amount of distress, and the disorder can dramatically interfere with a person's daily life. What Are the Types of OCD?...