

How to Help Your Child Cope with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

Habits related to Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), such as constant hand washing and counting steps, are only the outside expression of the battle being waged within your child.

OCD is an anxiety disorder that can rob your child of their happiness and their childhood if not properly diagnosed and treated.

Coping mechanisms may depend upon the cause of OCD (medications for those with excess levels of serotonin), but many children suffering from OCD respond positively to multiple forms of treatment.

Cognitive-Behavioral Psychotherapy

Cognitive-Behavioral Psychotherapy, CBT for short, is a popular treatment for those suffering from OCD.

There are many methods employed throughout the course of the individuals CBT treatments, but the most common include:

- Exposure to fears
- Recognition and response prevention
- Visualization techniques

CBT focuses on a child's ability to learn to recognize and respond to their fears accordingly, in a healthy way. With the help of a CBT-trained child therapist, children can successfully overcome their OCD and lead stress-free and happy lives.

Medications

In some cases of OCD, medications may be a required course of action, even if only for a short period of time.

In cases where an individual's symptoms are harmful to them (i.e. Excessive weight loss due to fears of choking), medications may be prescribed until such a time that the individual can get their fears under control.

Acceptance and Understanding

The most important thing you as a parent can do to help your child's healing is to accept them and understand that they do not want to be like this. No one wants to live in constant fear -- children especially.

Often, those with OCD know that their fears are irrational, but they do not have the appropriate tools to deal with them.

Acceptance can be tricky, as it can often lead to enabling the disease. Acceptance means meeting your child where they are at, but enabling is allowing them to stay in their current mindset.

Recognizing Enabling Behaviors

As a parent, you feel it is your job to ensure that your child is comfortable and happy.

When a child suffers from Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, a parent's desire to help their child can often get in the way of their healing, causing further issues down the line.

One way that parents can help their children when dealing with an OCD diagnosis is recognizing their own behaviors that enable their child's OCD.

This is not to say that parents are the *cause*. There are many factors that play into OCD, however, enabling your child and allowing their fears to rule your home can cause serious harm to themselves, as well as your family dynamic.

Common enabling behaviors include:

- Altering a family's routine to accommodate your child's fears
- Offering constant reassurance
- Accommodating OCD-related requests

These enabling behaviors may make your lives and the lives of your child easier in the short-term, but this will lead to serious issues in the family dynamic later on.

The only way to truly arm ourselves against the dangers of enabling is knowledge. Proper education on the causes, symptoms, and treatments of this disorder can better prepare yourself and your family to fight the good fight.

It isn't easy to fight an invisible enemy, but with the right treatment plans in place, as well as a healthy dose of acceptance, your child can be on their way to a more enjoyable life.