

If you are reading this article, there's a pretty good chance something is going on that doesn't seem okay. You might have also heard about something called obsessive compulsive disorder, or OCD. First, let's make sure we are talking about the same thing.

What is OCD?

A lot of people use the term OCD or the words “obsessive” and “compulsive” in ways that aren't always correct. You've probably heard your friends say they are “sooo OCD” because they have to have things a certain way, or heard someone called obsessive because they talk about the same things a lot. These things are not OCD. Some people think that individuals with OCD are just afraid of germs and wash their hands a lot. This is only one kind of OCD. There are actually many different kinds of OCD, and they can be about almost anything you can imagine.

So what is it, really? As you have probably guessed, OCD is made up of two parts — obsessions and compulsions.

Obsessions are unwanted thoughts that:

- You can't stop thinking over and over or get out of your head, even though you try very hard
- Can seem very real, almost like your own thoughts
- Are almost always creepy, scary, nasty, or disgusting
- Give you a lot of doubt about things that are important to you
- Keep telling you the same bad things every day, or keep changing all the time
- Can seem so weird that you can't understand why you would even think them

Obsessions can make you think:

- Something bad is going to happen to you or those you care about such as your family members, friends, pets, etc.
- You maybe did something bad or illegal (like cheating, breaking rules, lying, or stealing) that will get you in trouble, or that you really want to do something bad
- You want bad things to happen to other people, or want to do bad things to hurt others on purpose
- You are gay, even when you're sure you aren't
- Bad thoughts that have to do with sex
- You did something by accident that hurt someone or ruined something

- There are bad luck or good luck things such as numbers, words, names, or moving in special ways that you have to be very careful about doing the right way or something bad will happen to you or someone else
- Germs, dirt, or chemicals are everywhere, and you have to be very careful to stay clean and keep your things clean or you will get sick or make other people sick
- Bad thoughts about something religious
- You have to do your schoolwork perfectly and get perfect grades, or have to do other things perfectly, like the way you arrange things in your room

Thoughts like these can make you feel really anxious. They can also take up a lot of space in your head. Sometimes it can be hard to think about anything else. One other important thing to know about these thoughts is that the things they tell you aren't true. OCD seems to like making up things that are important to you and will really bother you the most.

If you have obsessive thoughts, then you probably also do things called compulsions. Compulsions are things you either do in your head or actions you carry out to try and help yourself to not be scared by the obsessions and make sure the bad things they are telling you don't happen. A lot of the time they are like habits. You feel like you just have to do them no matter what, even if they take a lot of time or are difficult to do.

Some compulsions a person can do are things like:

- Washing your hands, showering too much, or changing your clothes too many times
- Cleaning your belongings too carefully or too many times
- Having to say special words, numbers, or names, as if you were doing a magical ritual to keep bad things from happening
- Having to do things (like getting dressed, packing your backpack, etc.) in a special order
- Checking your homework or test answers over and over to make sure they are totally correct
- Making your letters perfect when you are writing (or else having to erase them and write them over a lot)
- Saying things perfectly to make sure you didn't lie, insult somebody, or say something that wasn't correct
- Checking yourself to make sure you aren't sick or that there isn't something wrong with the way you look
- Asking your parents the same questions too many times
- Having to pray too much to make sure God isn't angry with you for doing or thinking bad things, and sometimes having to say these prayers perfectly

- Having to redo things many times like putting your clothes on, writing things, getting out of chairs or beds, walking up or down stairs, or going in and out of doorways again and again, almost like a magic ritual to keep something bad from happening
- Checking too many times to make sure you really sent texts
- Apologizing too many times to other people or to God because you thought you said or did something wrong
- Having difficulty making decisions until you are sure you made the perfect one
- Arranging the things in your room to make sure they look perfect and having to fix them right away if someone moves even one of them

Does any of this sound like you so far? If it does, then there's a pretty good chance that you may have OCD. So now what? The first thing to do is to tell your parents or other trusted adult so they can help you feel better. They will likely take you to see someone who knows what to do — usually a doctor or psychologist who has been trained in how to help people with OCD. This means they know how to do a special treatment called exposure and response prevention (ERP).

If your parents still aren't sure about what is going on, you can show them this page or this webpage with information for parents.

When you go to see the doctor or psychologist, you can tell them about all the unwanted thoughts you are having (like those on the list above) and all the things you do to make the worry go away (like those on the list of compulsions above). The therapist will know what to do to help you learn to not fear the thoughts and to stop doing compulsions. You will learn that the best way to stop anything that makes you afraid is to learn how to face it and to see that it wasn't so scary after all. It always turns out that these things aren't bad or dangerous — only that OCD was telling you fake stories about them. You may have to work on all of this for a while, but it will be worth it to get these worries out of your head.

You will see that with the right kind of help, you can feel a lot better.