

# Natural Help 4...

## OCD in Children



### What is Obsessive Compulsive Disorder in Children?

All children have little worries and doubts, but when they can't stop thinking about them and it starts to affect their daily functioning it becomes a problem. OCD is a type of anxiety disorder which is **characterized by obsessions and compulsions**. Sometimes **ocd children** will become worried by certain thoughts or images; these are called obsessions.

**OCD children** might have disturbing thoughts of harming someone, even though they wouldn't - and certainly don't want to. **The problem is that children with OCD cannot stop these obsessions** no matter how badly they want to, which can be extremely stressful.

Other **OCD children** might **feel compelled to do certain actions over and over again**, these are called compulsions or rituals. Even though the child might be aware that what they are doing 'doesn't make sense', they feel extremely anxious if they don't follow through with the action.

Sometimes these compulsions are thought to prevent a terrible imagined event or outcome. In this case **the child feels personally responsible for doing the action so that nothing bad happens**.

While some might think this is just a case of superstition, with OCD ritualistic behavior has great psychological impact. In other instances these actions can serve to counter-act a disturbing obsessive thought.

### Diagnosing Obsessive Compulsive Disorder in Children

A psychologist or psychiatrist usually does a thorough assessment before diagnosing OCD. In your consultation you will probably be asked to give a detailed description of your child's troubling behaviors as well as any family history of anxiety or other disorders such as Tourette's syndrome.

**It is advisable to write these down before the consultation**, noting the time your child spends on each ritual, so that you can provide a more accurate and detailed description.

Your child will also be asked a series of age-appropriate questions about his/her worries and compulsions and how they might be affecting his/her daily life. Once a diagnosis is made, be sure to ask about all possible treatment options and explore which ones would best suit your child!

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While psychiatric drugs are often prescribed as a matter of course, these are not always the only option and research has shown that a combination of treatment modalities is usually the most successful way of **treating OCD in children** .

## Symptoms of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder in Children

The symptoms of **OCD in children** vary and are often personal and unique to the child with the disorder. Some common obsessions and compulsions that you might recognize in your child are:

### Common obsessions include:

- Fear of dirt or germs
- Need for symmetry and order
- Fixation with body waste
- Lucky and unlucky numbers
- Aggressive or sexual thoughts that are seen as “bad” or “immoral”
- Fear that something terrible will happen to a loved one

### Common compulsions include:

- Washing hands over and over again
- Repetitive and lengthy teeth-brushing or showering
- Repetitive checking of doors and switches
- Collecting and hoarding specific items
- Counting items over and over
- Repeating specific words and phrases in a particular order
- Rearranging things to create order and ‘balance’
- Repeating actions a certain amount of times
- Having a strict ritual before going to bed that has to be followed exactly
- Rituals to ‘undo’ a thought or to prevent an unwanted event

While obsessions are always present in OCD, compulsions are not necessarily a part of the disorder. While they are common, compulsions do not occur in every case of OCD. Some children experience only the intrusive, repetitive thoughts and worries (obsessions), without accompanying compulsions.

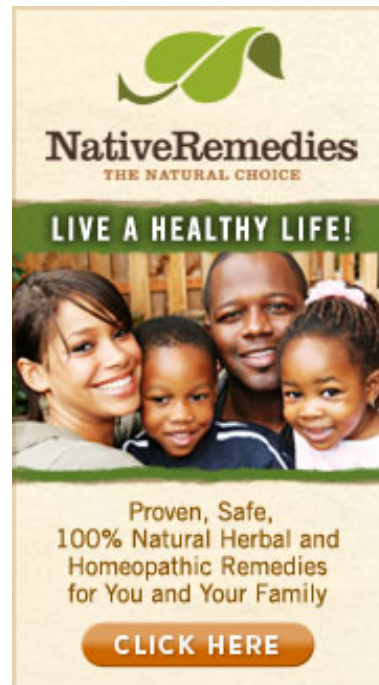
## Who can Suffer from OCD? Is there a Cure?

**OCD in children** is usually diagnosed between the ages of 7 and 12. This is a time when children are becoming very aware of fitting in with their peers, and they begin to notice their own odd behaviors.

**OCD can make a child feel very alone**, anxious and out of control, so it is advisable to seek help as soon as it is suspected. There are a number of treatment options available to **OCD children** that have shown promising results. It is possible for your child to have a happy and relatively anxious-free childhood!

## When Should You worry about OCD?

It is important to remember that children often like to do things in a certain way – sit their favorite toy bunny on the end of the bed, eat their peas before their meat



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### Michele Carelse, Clinical Psychologist



All of our natural remedies are formulated by our expert team of herbalists, naturopaths and homeopaths, and headed by Michele Carelse.

Michele has had years of experience in the manufacturing and use of natural remedies. In addition, she is a trained Clinical Psychologist and has been incorporating natural remedies into her treatment of patients with depression, anxiety, ADD, ADHD and stress for many years with spectacular results.

or read their favorite story over and over at night. For most children these ritualistic actions are merely a game or a comforting routine.

However, if **obsessions and compulsions are interfering with your child's quality of life** or are overly time-consuming or disruptive, it is important to seek professional help. While some of these behaviors may appear to be harmless little quirks, they may be causing your child undue anxiety and stress.

OCD also has other developmental implications such as a decreased ability to concentrate at school and low self-image – particularly for children who don't seem to fit in with peers.

## Recognizing OCD in Children

Remember that children are sometimes prone to 'magical thinking' (e.g. don't step on the cracks or the bears will get you!) and some of the symptoms listed above can be perfectly normal – especially in the child with an active imagination.

However, you know you have a problem when your child is constantly distressed by these thoughts or behaviors or when they interfere significantly with functioning.

**In many cases children try to contain or mask their obsessions and rituals.** For this reason, parents often don't realize for some time that their child has OCD or may think the few odd behaviors they do see are just a passing phase. As OCD usually comes on gradually, these behaviors may come on so slowly, that they seem normal to the parent.

A child may ask the parent to participate in some of the rituals at first, seeking reassurance that everything is OK. "I touched dirt, am I ok?" to which the parent responds "You're fine."

Failure to respond in this routine way may result in tantrums, or acting-out behavior. Very young children may ask parents to repeat a word or phrase 'till it sounds right'.

Here are some warning signs to look out for in your child:

- Sore, dry hands from constant hand-washing
- Going through more soap than usual
- Constant concerns about germs
- A noticeable increase in laundry
- Avoidance of activities that involve getting dirty
- A sudden drop in test grades
- Handing in assignments late or not at all
- Often being late for school
- Odd requests for people to repeat words or phrases
- An extremely long amount of time spent getting ready for bed or school
- Extreme tiredness, as they stay up late at night obsessing and performing necessary bed-time rituals
- A constant worry about the well-being of family members

## What Causes OCD in Children?

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There is no definite theory as to what causes **OCD in children**. The matter is mainly separated into two schools of thought.

#### Possible Causes of OCD in Children

#### **Biological Causes:**

- **Genetics** - studies suggest that a tendency towards anxiety may be hereditary.
- **Brain chemistry abnormalities** - Brain imaging studies have shown that people with OCD sometimes show different neuro-chemical brain activities than those without OCD.

#### **Psychological Causes:**

- Some children feel that thinking something bad is morally just as bad as doing it. "If I think of hitting you, it's morally the same as actually hitting you and so I must be a terrible and violent person."
- Some children feel overly responsible for what happens around them and think certain thoughts are dangerous. "If I think that, it might actually happen and then I will be to blame."

## **Help for Obsessive Compulsive Disorder in Children**

There are a wide variety of **OCD treatments for children** and it is advisable to explore all options before deciding on a treatment plan.

#### **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)**

This form of therapy has been a very successful **OCD treatment for children** since it can be adapted to suit the needs of each child. Cognitive behavioral therapy focuses on the irrational thoughts behind the obsessions and compulsions and teaches children to overcome them. For example, children may be encouraged to gradually face their fears and change their responses to these fears.

If a child fears dirt, a CBT therapist will help to challenge the child's perception that dirt is dangerous and will encourage fun games that involve getting the hands dirty. This is done slowly and sensitively at your child's own pace. Through exposure to the object or situation, the child learns not to fear it.

CBT also encourages the child to stop ritualistic behaviors by offering more constructive ways of dealing with anxiety. This form of therapy has promising long term effects, and works best with the co-operation of family members!

#### **Drug Therapy**

Several medications have been shown to help with the symptoms of OCD, some of which are clomipramine, fluoxetine, fluvoxamine, sertraline, and paroxetine. While these anti-depressant drugs may be successful at lessening the symptoms, they do not address the root of the disorder and symptoms will generally reappear once the medication is stopped.



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These drugs also cause unwanted side effects such as dry mouth, nausea, and drowsiness which can be distressing to any child and possibly inhibit learning. While prescription medication can be effective as part of a broader treatment plan, it is not always necessary for treatment.

It is strongly advised that you research these drugs thoroughly and make an informed decision.

## Natural herbal and homeopathic remedies

There are a number of **herbal and homeopathic remedies that may assist in the struggle against OCD**. The benefit of a natural approach is that correctly formulated remedies can have all the benefits of medicinal treatment without the negative side effects of prescription drugs.

OCD is strongly associated with imbalances in brain chemistry and there are a number of herbal remedies that have been shown to be **effective in restoring chemical balance and neurological health in the brain**. In addition, because anxiety levels contribute significantly to OCD symptoms, herbal and homeopathic remedies that help to reduce anxiety levels may also be of benefit in the treatment of OCD.

Used alone or in conjunction with psychotherapy, **herbal and homeopathic remedies can be used in [OCD treatment for children](#) to help bring your child peace of mind in a gentle, natural way**. Some commonly recommended remedies include Hypericum perforatum (St John's Wort), Passiflora incarnata, Scutellaria laterifolia (Scullcap) and Valerian.

Discuss this option with your doctor or consult a homeopath or naturopath for advice.

## Other Disorders Related to OCD

It is not uncommon to find other disorders or associated problems co-existing with OCD. In some cases OCD is accompanied by:

- Other anxiety disorders
- Depression
- Eating disorders
- Substance abuse
- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- Tourette's syndrome
- Poor self-image or low self-esteem
- Irritability
- Poor time management

## Myths Surrounding OCD in Children

### Some OCD myths include:

- Children with OCD are trying to get attention
- Children with OCD can control these behaviors, but choose not to

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- Annoying habits such as nail-biting, teeth-grinding or thorough grooming are OCD

## Tips for Parents with an OCD Child

Your child will most likely come to you for support. It is important to be understanding, and to take the time to talk about the disorder if your child initiates a discussion.

### Remember:

- Try not to rush your child's progress or create added pressure or stress. Every child's recovery is different.
- Learn as much as you can about OCD. Knowing more about the disorder will help prepare you for what to expect and how to better assist your child.
- Be supportive by participating in your child's treatment and listening your child's concerns.
- Reward the little things! Recovery is a slow and difficult process so every small step should be seen as an accomplishment.
- Never blame or punish your child for his/her OCD behavior! Support and encouragement are far more helpful. Children with OCD have little control over their symptoms and need help, not punishment.
- Try and keep your family life-style as normal as possible. Do not overly accommodate your home life to fit in with your child's obsessions or compulsions.
- Seek support for yourself so that you can express your own feelings and concerns. Your child's recovery can also be a stressful process for you, your partner and your other children.

## Tips for Teaching an OCD Child

A great portion of a child's day is spent in the classroom. It is a good idea to:

- Communicate with the child's parents and therapist so that you can actively participate in the recovery process
- Make use of a home-school diary so that you can maintain constant communication with the child's parents and can note any progress or behavioral changes
- Be supportive and non-critical. Let the child know that you are there to help and assist
- Make appropriate time-allowances for written tests if necessary
- On "bad days" make sure the child can photocopy notes and provide further explanations or tutoring if needed
- Set a good example for accepting the pupil. It is important for teachers to discourage teasing by responding quickly and firmly whenever it occurs

## The Natural Approach

While Western medicine has become the norm in many cultures, it is not the only treatment option. Conventional western medicine, often called allopathic medicine, is the system of medicine taught at most medical schools and most pharmaceutical and synthetic medicines are manufactured and marketed according to the principles of allopathic medicine. Allopathic medicine is also

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sometimes called orthodox medicine.

Because most of us in the Western world have grown up in a society in which allopathic medicine is the prevailing norm, we forget that, only a few decades ago, homeopathic, herbal and other natural medicines were commonly available – and freely used even by conventional doctors. While there are often heated debates about which system of medicine is ‘better’ than the other, many responsible doctors (whether they are allopathic or not) recognize that both have a role to play in the treatment program.

Natural medicine has often been frowned on by conventional doctors, especially by those who did not have sufficient knowledge of these medicines. However, it is encouraging to note that some medical schools are now beginning to re-introduce it into their course work, thereby providing doctors with a wider range of treatment options from which to choose. In many countries, especially in Europe, India and China, natural and homeopathic medicines are commonly prescribed by conventional doctors and represent a significant part of the total annual drug sales.

Naturopathy is a branch of medicine (just as allopathy is a branch of medicine) which operates according to the underlying philosophy that the body has an innate capacity to heal itself. While natural medicines are often called ‘alternative’ or ‘complimentary’ medicines, they are, in fact, a unique and independent form of medicine in their own right, well able to treat a variety of conditions. Perhaps the term ‘holistic’ medicine is more apt, given the broad range of treatment options and approaches which are to be found within the practice of natural medicine, which encompasses many different disciplines, including herbalism, homeopathy, iridology, osteopathy, chiropractic, therapeutic massage techniques, aromatherapy, acupuncture and many, many more.

Most naturopaths will use a variety of treatment modalities in order to treat their patients in a holistic way to support health, relieve symptoms and prevent future disease. In fact, even the World Health Organization defines health as being "... more than simply the absence of illness. It is the active state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being." This is a wonderfully clear description of holistic or natural medicine, which strives to support health (thereby relieving or preventing symptoms), rather than simply eliminating disease.

Although allopathic medicine certainly has a role to play and has made a tremendous contribution to medical science during the past century, there is a growing perception that it is not the only answer and that, in many cases, holistic medicine can accomplish just as much, if not more – without the risk of side effects, addiction and sacrifice to health so commonly associated with pharmaceutical drugs. Contrary to common perception, and provided that they are manufactured in the correct way, natural medicines can work quickly and safely to promote healing.

In many cases, they can succeed where pharmaceutical drugs have failed. Despite frequent reports that they are ‘unproven’ and ‘untested’, the opposite is true. Natural medicines have a long history of usage and there is a wealth of empirical evidence to support their effectiveness and safety. In addition, active clinical research is carried out by many academic hospitals and universities to support the extensive traditional and empirical evidence behind natural medicines.

It is also important to know that, like any medicine, herbal and homeopathic medicines must be manufactured in the correct way, following acceptable

procedures and manufacturing methods to ensure maximum effectiveness and safety. Due to the recent rise in popularity of natural remedies, many companies have sprung up to take advantage of the market. Unfortunately not all of them are equipped to manufacture to the correct standards, often resulting in a flood of inferior (and sometimes even unsafe) remedies onto the market – and giving natural remedies a bad name.

Even some pharmaceutical companies have rushed to claim their market share by producing so-called ‘standardized’ extracts of herbs and offering these as superior to the tried and tested methods of naturopathic manufacturing. Nothing could be further from the truth. While ‘standardized’ extracts may offer benefit of easy consistency of dosage (and cheaper more efficient production lines), they have grave disadvantages. These include an increase in side effects as the medicines produced in this manner lose the natural protective properties of the herbs. In some cases, these side effects have proved fatal – as was seen in the liver toxicity associated with standardized extracts of kava kava, a herb previously safely used for generations without any known side effects.

Most naturopaths recommend what is called the Full Spectrum Method of extraction – which retains the benefits of ALL the active ingredients within the herb as opposed to isolating only one – thereby providing a more complete treatment as well as superior protection against side effects.

Whatever your choice, always choose wisely. Research what is best for you. If you have a chronic or life threatening condition, don’t make changes without first discussing them with your doctor in order that your condition may be monitored. Well informed and supportive practitioners will support patients who want to take responsibility for their own health.

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