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Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Read this page if your child worries a lot about things that could happen, or if she needs to do some things over and over. Learn what you can do to help your child.

What is obsessive-compulsive disorder?

Obsessive-compulsive disorder (ob-SEH-siv cum-PUL-siv) is a medical problem that affects behavior. There are 2 parts to this problem:

- Getting "stuck" on the same thoughts. This is called **obsession (ob-SEH-shun)**. For some children, these are thoughts that make them worried or upset, like something bad happening. Many children get stuck on a topic that can be fun, like baseball scores, or the way that elevators work. Either way, they can't stop having these thoughts, even though having the same thought over and over again can lead to other problems or make them sad or scared. The obsessions are harder to see because they are thoughts. So you will probably only know about the obsessions if the person talks about them.
- Needing to do the same things over and over again, like checking that the door is locked. This is called **compulsions (cum-PUL-shuns)**. The things that some kids need to do might seem weird. They might not make sense. Most people with obsessive-compulsive disorder know that their compulsions don't make sense. But they can't stop doing them. They can't stop because the compulsions make them feel better for a short time. But the compulsions are actions that you can see. Most parents realize quickly that their child NEEDS to do this behavior, over and over again. It is hard to pull your child away from the thing he is doing, even if it hurts (like pulling out her hair).

Obsessive-compulsive disorder can come with other problems

Obsessive-compulsive disorder can come with other problems, like:

- [depression](http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/special/depression/) (<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/special/depression/>)
- [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder \(ADHD\)](http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/special/adhd/) (<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/special/adhd/>)
- tics or movements that the child can't control
- pulling out hair
- taking things or stealing compulsively
- hoarding, keeping everything, or collecting things that may or may not make sense

Anyone can get obsessive-compulsive disorder

- Both boys and girls can have OCD.
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder can start at any age. Young and old people can get it. But it usually starts when the person is a child or a teenager.

People with OCD can get help for it. But for many deaf children, the obsessions or compulsions are part of a bigger problem, like [autism](http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/special/autism/) (<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/special/autism/>) or an [infection that happened during pregnancy](http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/hearingloss/causes/index.jsp#infection) (<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/hearingloss/causes/index.jsp#infection>).

Signs of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

You might not know if your child has obsessions. But you will probably notice if your child has compulsions. Keep note of things your child does if they worry you.

Some examples of obsessions

- Being scared of germs.
- Being scared of getting hurt or sick.
- Being scared of hurting someone you care about, like family or friends. Even if you know you would never hurt them on purpose.
- Focusing over and over on a goal, or buying something.
- Not being able to put off something at all.
- Insisting on getting their way.
- Trying very very hard to be perfect.

Some examples of compulsions

- Washing your hands over and over.
- Checking to make sure the door is locked over and over.
- Keeping little things that you don't need. Like scraps of paper or pieces of food.
- Cleaning things that are already clean.
- Keeping up an argument past the point where people usually give up.

Deaf children may have different obsessions than hearing children

Deaf children and adolescents can also have obsessions and compulsions, but often, the topics are different. For example, many deaf children are obsessed with schedules. This makes sense, because so much happens around them without warning.

At first, being obsessed with schedules makes them less nervous about things happening without warning. Unfortunately, this can continue until it gets totally out of control. Your child may need to check with you about the day's schedule 40 to 50 times a day.

Deaf children may have different compulsions than hearing children

For some deaf children, the compulsion is the need to sign the same phrase over and over again. This also makes sense, since they first learn language with so much effort and repetition. Or many deaf children will ask the same question over and over again. Giving the child an answer does not always help. The child might keep asking.

Make notes of what your child is doing

If your child has some of these signs, write some notes to yourself about what your child is doing and how often this is a problem. Then, take her to the doctor, and bring your notes! Explain carefully what is going on, as the doctor may be distracted by the deafness. Ask the doctor and the counselors at your child's school to tell you who can help. With the right help, your child can succeed. The doctor will probably give you the name of a psychologist or a psychiatrist. These are people that know a lot about problems of the mind, like obsessive-compulsive disorder. Hopefully, the person you see will also know about deaf children.

How You Can Help Your Child

Some children with obsessive-compulsive disorder are not bothered by the problem, or can manage life with it. But some children have it so badly that it is hard for them to live normal lives. They need to get help.

With the right help, people with obsessive-compulsive disorder can take control of their own thoughts and behaviors. Life is a lot easier when children are not being controlled by strange thoughts or habits.

The kinds of help you can get

The best help usually uses both therapy and medicine.

Behavioral therapy

In **behavioral therapy (be-HAIV-yur-al THER-ah-pee)**, you and your child will talk to a doctor who knows a lot about obsessive-compulsive disorder. The doctor will help your child learn how to see the problem and stop the thought or the compulsions.

Medicine

A doctor may give your child medicine to help stop the obsessions. The medicine might also help her feel less nervous or scared. The medicine won't work right away. It can take a few months before you will know if the medicine is really helping. Sometimes, parents see improvement after a few weeks though.

Right now there are 5 different medicines that help people with obsessive-compulsive disorder. All 5 medicines work on the same chemical in the brain. That chemical is called **serotonin**. But the 5 medicines are not exactly the same. Ask your child's doctor which medicine is best for her. If 1 medicine does not work, another kind might. Your child's doctor may suggest a change if the first try does not work.

These medicines can have side effects.

Some medicines have side effects. Ask your child's doctor what they are before your child starts taking the medicine. Some side effects could be:

- Being more tired
- Constipation (not being able to have a bowel movement)
- Stomach ache
- Nervousness
- Head aches

Most of these side effects go away after 1 or 2 weeks.

Medicine by itself does not usually work as well as medicine and therapy together. Medicine is not instead of therapy. Try to get your child both kinds of help, because this problem is best to fix when your child is young. Obsessive and compulsive behaviors can become life-long habits.

How to find help if your child has a hearing problem and obsessive-compulsive disorder

It can be hard to get help for a deaf child with obsessions and compulsions, but things are getting better. Here are some things you can do:

- Ask your child's school for the name of a good doctor who has helped other deaf children before.
- Ask for an interpreter for your child's appointment. Or plan how your child will understand what people are saying, and how she will tell others what she is thinking.
- Look for a psychologist or a psychiatrist who knows about deafness. Even if they do not know a lot about obsessive-compulsive disorder, you can look for more help together. Try to find someone who understands what your child says, and who talks in a way that your child can understand. If your child uses sign language, look for someone who uses sign language.
- Look for workbooks in the bookstore or library that help adults and children understand obsessive-compulsive disorder and stop what is happening. Show these workbooks to your child's counselor. Discuss ways of making the pages helpful for your child. You might need to re-write pages in a way that makes sense to her.
- Do not accept if your doctor tells you that this problem is because your child is deaf. Deafness does NOT cause obsessions and compulsions.

Learn more about obsessive-compulsive disorder

Check out these websites to find out more about obsessive-compulsive disorder.

- The National Institute of Mental Health's "[Facts about Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/anxiety/ocdfacts.cfm)" (<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/anxiety/ocdfacts.cfm>)
- KidsHealth's [page on obsessive-compulsive disorder](http://kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/emotion/ocd.html) (<http://kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/emotion/ocd.html>)
- [The Obsessive-Compulsive Foundation](http://www.ocfoundation.org/) (<http://www.ocfoundation.org/>)
- Find [support groups for parents of children with obsessive-compulsive disorder](http://www.ocfoundation.org/ocf1170a.htm). (<http://www.ocfoundation.org/ocf1170a.htm>)
- If your child pulls out her hair, [visit the Trichotillomania Learning Center](http://www.trich.org). (<http://www.trich.org>)
- If your child makes movements that she cannot control, or noises, or signs bad words without a reason, [visit the Tourette Spectrum Disorder Association](http://www.tourettesyndrome.org/) (<http://www.tourettesyndrome.org/>). Or visit the KidsHealth [page on Tourette Syndrome](http://www.kidshealth.org/parent/medical/brain/tourette.html) (<http://www.kidshealth.org/parent/medical/brain/tourette.html>).

This page was last edited on February 3, 2004.

You can find this page online at:

<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/special/ocd/>