

What Is OCD?

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is a condition in which a person gets caught in a cycle of unwanted thoughts or feelings and repeated attempts to reduce the distress they cause.

OBSESSIONS	COMPULSIONS
Unwanted thoughts, images, urges, sensations, or doubts that create distress or feel difficult to leave alone.	Behaviors or mental acts used to reduce distress, prevent something bad, gain certainty, or make things feel right. Relief is usually temporary.

Common OCD themes

• Contamination • Harm • Responsibility • Checking and mistakes • Health • Relationships • Sexual obsessions	• Identity or sexual orientation • Scrupulosity and morality • Existential fears • "Just right" and symmetry • False memory or real-event OCD • Sensorimotor or somatic • Fear of losing control
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OCD can attach itself to almost anything that feels important. The theme may change over time. The cycle is more important than the specific topic.

The OCD cycle

1. Obsession A thought, doubt, image, urge, or feeling appears.	2. Distress Anxiety, guilt, disgust, uncertainty, or a "not right" feeling increases.
3. Compulsion You do something to feel safer, more certain, or more comfortable.	4. Temporary relief The discomfort drops for a while, reinforcing the cycle.

A useful question is: "What is OCD asking me to do next?"

Compulsions and Treatment

Compulsions are not always visible. They can happen outwardly or silently in the mind.

BEHAVIORAL COMPULSIONS	MENTAL COMPULSIONS
• Washing or cleaning • Checking • Repeating actions • Arranging or ordering • Seeking reassurance • Confessing • Avoiding triggers • Retracing or redoing • Re-reading or re-writing	• Reviewing memories • Checking feelings or intentions • Analyzing what a thought means • Replaying conversations • Mentally comparing • Counting or repeating phrases • Neutralizing with prayer • Replacing "bad" thoughts • Trying to gain certainty

What makes it a compulsion?

The function matters. A behavior or mental act becomes part of the OCD cycle when it is being used to reduce distress, prevent danger, neutralize a thought, gain certainty, or make something feel right.

Treatments for OCD

ERP Exposure and Response Prevention	Face triggers, thoughts, feelings, and uncertainty while reducing compulsions and avoidance. This gives you opportunities to learn a different response.
I-CBT Inference-Based CBT	Learn to recognize when OCD pulls you away from what you actually know and into an imagined possibility or doubt.
ACT Acceptance and Commitment Therapy	Practice allowing unwanted thoughts and feelings while choosing actions based on your values rather than OCD's demands.

OCD is treatable. Treatment focuses on changing how you respond to obsessions, doubts, and urges rather than allowing OCD to dictate what you do next.