

Supporting a person with OCD

Although OCD, BDD and OCD Spectrum disorders are usually complicated and frustrating, caring relatives and friends can help a great deal. When a person with OCD, BDD or an OCD Spectrum disorder undergoes an assessment it can be helpful, if they choose to allow it, to have the family, carer or friend involved. It can also be beneficial if the family, carer or friend is involved in the treatment, but this does depend on the wishes of the person with the disorder. As much as possible, a collaborative approach should be encouraged.

The family, carer or friend of the person with OCD, BDD or an OCD Spectrum disorder may feel as if they have to take part in or support the compulsions or rituals, even if they do not want to. It is important to discuss this with the healthcare professional so that they can help to support the family, carer or friend. Independent assessments for other children and young people who may be considered at risk as a result of the behaviour of a parent, carer or sibling with the disorder should be considered. Psychological treatment for the family, carer or friend may also help.

A person with OCD, BDD or an OCD Spectrum disorder will be helped immensely by having a supportive, understanding and empathetic family and social network. The following advice may be useful if you have a friend or relative with OCD, BDD or an OCD Spectrum disorder:

- Acknowledge that the OCD, BDD or OCD Spectrum disorder exists and try to learn about it. There are several useful publications that OCD Action can recommend.
- Remember that the OCD, BDD or OCD Spectrum disorder symptoms, however bizarre or extreme they may seem, are part of a treatable disorder. The symptoms are not personality traits or something that the person can just 'snap out of'.
- Do not regard OCD, BDD or OCD Spectrum disorder as the person's fault and try not to believe that you or anyone else may have caused it.
- If the person decides to seek professional help, be supportive of that decision and encourage their determination to recover.
- Encourage the person with OCD, BDD or OCD Spectrum disorder to persist with their treatment, even when this seems difficult, and show appreciation of any improvement, however small.
- Remember that symptoms may wax and wane. Some days, the person may be able to deal with symptoms better than others. Each person needs to overcome their problems at their own pace, even though this may be a lengthy process.
- Allow the person to explain their problems to you. This will help them to feel less isolated and ashamed of their condition. The symptoms may seem unrealistic and irrational to you, but the fear for the person with OCD, BDD or OCD Spectrum disorder is very real.
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- While supporting the person with OCD, BDD or OCD Spectrum disorder try not to support the obsessions and compulsions. The worst thing to do is to give reassurance to the person that their fears are unfounded. If you do this, the person will not learn this for themselves and the disorder will persist. Encourage the person to challenge the obsessions and compulsions.
- People with OCD, BDD or OCD Spectrum disorder are often aware of the humorous aspects of their obsessions and compulsions. This awareness can be used to help them distance themselves from the condition. However, resist mocking the person's symptoms as this may cause additional stress, shame and embarrassment.
- At home, people with OCD, BDD or OCD Spectrum disorder should be encouraged to maintain as normal a lifestyle as possible. Families should not try to adapt their ways of doing things to accommodate the person's obsessions and compulsions.
- Remember that OCD, BDD or OCD Spectrum disorder is tough for families to deal with. Continue to communicate with each other. Remember also that the family, friends and carers of people with OCD, BDD or OCD Spectrum disorder need help and support themselves. Make sure you continue to do things you enjoy and have people to talk to about your own feelings and concerns.

This leaflet is part of a series that includes;

1. What is OCD?
2. Assessment and Diagnosis
3. Accessing Treatment – your rights
4. What is Cognitive Behavioural Therapy?
5. Medication for OCD
6. Young people and OCD
- 7. Supporting a person with OCD**
8. Habit Disorders
9. BDD

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