

Healthy Kids

What are good resources on OCD?

Katherine K. Dahlsgaard, Ph.D., Lead Psychologist, The Anxiety Behaviors Clinic, Children's Hospital of Philadelphia

Posted: Wednesday, July 2, 2013

OCD is characterized by two main symptoms: 1) obsessions, which are repetitive thoughts, images, or doubts that CAUSE DISTRESS (e.g., fear, disgust), and 2) compulsions, which are behaviors performed to neutralize the distress of obsessions. I'm stressing the distress aspect of obsessions here for a reason: I often hear from parents (and even some treatment providers) that a child has OCD because he is "obsessed with trains." Being obsessed with trains is like being obsessed with smoking – people do it because they LIKE to do it. NO ONE likes having OCD.

In terms of treatment for OCD, The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) deemed cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) the evidence-based, recommended treatment for mild to moderate cases of pediatric OCD in their 1998 and 2012 practice parameters. The treatment guideline for severe cases of OCD is the combination of CBT and an SSRI such as Prozac or Zoloft.

This is because many well-controlled, randomized studies with children and adults have consistently shown the success of a type of CBT, specifically exposure and response prevention (ERP). Very briefly, ERP involves helping OCD sufferers gradually and repeatedly expose themselves to the distressing thoughts or situations without engaging in avoidance or other neutralizing compulsions. Over time, distress diminishes, along with the urge to perform the compulsions. Published reviews of OCD treatment studies report that ERP benefited 60 percent to 90 percent of those with OCD, typically with a 50 percent to 80 percent reduction in symptoms.

Recommended resources:

Website:

The best one-stop shopping website for general information on OCD is run by the International OCD Foundation at www.ocfoundation.org. The website is run by a non-for-profit organization and features good general information, a special section on OCD in children and teens, reviews of current treatment recommendations, and even a section on good questions to ask when interviewing a potential therapist for ERP. There's also a newsletter!

<http://www.ocfoundation.org/newsletters.aspx>

Conferences/Workshops/Support Groups:

The IOCDF also runs a pretty awesome annual conference that attracts a mixture of researchers, treatment providers, and those with OCD – it will happen in Atlanta this year July 19-21 and will feature a weekend workshop for kids with OCD (and their siblings!) entitled, delightfully, “Kicking OCD’s Butt.”

<http://blog.iocdf.org/2013/06/20/2013-conference-highlights-kicking-ocds-butt/>

Books for children/books for parents:

My go-to recommendation for an intervention and tips guide for OCD is Dawn Huebner’s stupendous *What to Do When Your Brain Gets Stuck: A Kid’s Guide for Overcoming OCD*. A brief workbook for the intended audience of 6-12 year olds, I recommend this to just about every family I see – yes, even to the parents – because it is well-written, good with translating ERP interventions to the everyday, and is SHORT (meaning: kids and parents will actually read the whole thing). It’s also lighthearted and funny.

Nerd Corner:

Occasionally, the more skeptical and/or science-minded of my patients asks for published, scientific studies. (Note: I love this). For OCD, I send them directly to AACAP’s published treatment guidelines. Bad news: It’s 16 pages. Good news: Every one of those pages is a goldmine.