

Managing OCD at Home

According to Ian Osborn (Tormenting Thoughts, Secret Rituals, p.149) parents typically err in one of two ways, both of which are natural reactions to OCD:

1. Assisting with rituals: (e.g. indulging a child's compulsions or rituals, and supporting 'avoidance'. This just reinforces self-defeating habits).
2. Becoming angered by obsessions & compulsions: (e.g. taking a hard line on OCD. This increases stress, generates additional anxiety, and ends up making the original problem worse).

When parents either indulge or become hard-line, they get drawn into vicious cycles: "Their natural responses to OCD symptoms - even if well intentioned - produce the contrary effect of making rituals worse."

An approach which avoids the extremes of "indulgence" & "disapproval" is recommended by Osborn & other experts:

- a. Take a sympathetic attitude & avoid any personal criticism of your child. Empathize & express confidence in your child's strength, reminding them of their previous successes & future 'goals'.
- b. Externalize the problem: e.g. "Do you really want to let the OCD bully push you around this way?"
- c. Encourage discussions about feelings & worries: if possible, "problem solving" should be the focus of discussions. This dovetails with Greene's model of Collaborative and Proactive Solutions (CPS).
- d. Your ultimate goal as a parent should be to stop participating in your child's compulsions, but this needs to occur supportively and through mutually acceptable contracts or agreements.
- e. Don't give in, however, to demands to provide unnecessary reassurance.
- f. Encourage your child to take *reasonable* risks: focus on gradually "shaping" success & give liberal praise for even small steps.
- g. While encouraging your child to 'break' their OCD rules & rituals, don't push changes before your child is ready.
- h. Demonstrate, by example, that anxiety is 'no big deal'.
- i. Work on co-parenting: don't allow your child to 'divide & conquer'.