

Overview - Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) is a serious anxiety-related mental health condition characterised by obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviour. Half of all people with OCD will have it to a severe degree.

Obsessions are intrusive and repetitive thoughts that cause significant distress. Compulsive behaviours are enacted to quieten anxiety and prevent the obsession coming true, but only temporarily relieve the distress. Behaviours can involve physical acts or mental thought rituals. There are four main categories of OCD: checking, ruminations, hoarding and contamination/mental contamination. Someone fearing they will catch a disease may have a shower every time they use a toilet (contamination category).

OCD is a debilitating condition: it consumes significant time (an hour or more), causes anguish, and affects daily functioning. Those with OCD are usually aware their thinking and behaviour is senseless but are incapable of stopping themselves, feeling solely responsible for preventing harm to themselves or others.

OCD is treatable through CBT either alone or alongside medication to reduce the person's anxiety. OCD symptoms can be exacerbated by stress.

Students with OCD may experience the following:

- Mental and physical exhaustion from the effort of withstanding intrusive thoughts and completing compulsive acts.
- Over-sleeping to avoid intrusive thoughts.
- Perfectionism – feeling compelled to re-work academic assignments exhaustively.
- A compulsive need to confess to perceived wrongdoing - acts of omission or commission thought to be inappropriate.
- Avoiding certain environments/tasks which are perceived as harmful.
- Avoiding friends for fear of harming them.
- Low mood/depression.
- Low confidence and self-esteem.
- Good days and bad days.



Top tips for academic staff:

- This is a variable condition. Be flexible about attendance and participation – a student may struggle to get up for morning sessions or be preoccupied with tamping down intrusive thoughts.
- Be ready to provide one-to-one tutorials to compensate for missed learning in taught sessions.
- Offer advice to keep a student from getting stressed about academic tasks: support her/him not to take on too many projects or commitments, to pace academic tasks and to have reasonable expectations of achievement.
- Support adjusted deadlines when OCD symptoms incapacitate the student and hinder completion of assignments.
- Be open to the student talking about her/his health experiences and listen actively. Be respectful and not intrusive - ask the student what would be helpful.
- Liaise with the student and Accessibility to arrange appropriate reasonable adjustments if OCD symptoms significantly impact on engagement in course tasks.
- Liaise with the student and Accessibility in advance of field trips and placements to ensure the student has access to appropriate facilities and accommodation.
- If you have concerns about a student, contact Student Services (studentservices@fxplus.ac.uk).

Useful links

- <http://beyondocd.org/information-for-college-students>
- <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/obsessive-compulsive-disorder-ocd>
- <http://www.studenthealth.co.uk/advice/advice.asp?adviceID=220>
- <https://www.ocduk.org>

