

SUPPORTING A LOVED ONE WITH OCD

What is OCD?

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is an anxiety disorder.

People with OCD often experience:

- Obsessions: unwanted, distressing thoughts or images.
- Compulsions: repetitive behaviours or mental rituals done to reduce anxiety.

People with OCD usually know their fears and behaviours *don't make logical sense*. This awareness can create shame, embarrassment, or frustration, which often make them less likely to talk openly about their struggles.

Supportive Alternatives

- Show empathy for the distress without feeding the OCD.
- Remind them that OCD is not their fault, the thoughts aren't who they are.
- Encourage your loved one's own coping skills and treatment strategies.
- Reinforce their courage in facing the anxiety, even if it feels small.

Important to Remember

- Most helpful for recovery = compassion instead of accommodation
- Embody a calm, empathetic state
- Small steps away from accommodation make a **significant** difference over time.

Why “Not Accommodating” Matters

- Loved ones instinctively want to help. This often looks like reassuring or assisting with rituals (e.g., answering repeated questions, checking things, avoiding triggers or difficult topics).
- While all well-intentioned, this reinforces OCD, teaching the brain: “This ritual is necessary for me to feel safe.”
- Over time, accommodations make OCD stronger and harder to resist.

Helpful Phrases to Try

Instead of giving reassurance or doing the ritual, you might try saying:

- “*I believe you can handle the uncertainty.*”
- “*That sounds like OCD talking, how do you want to respond?*”
- “*I care about you too much to participate in OCD rituals, but I'll support you while you ride out the anxiety.*”
- “*You've got this, and I can help remind you to ride the wave*”
- “*I love you, and I don't want to make OCD stronger. I'm not going to answer/do that, but I'll sit with you until the feeling passes.*”
- “*I won't answer that question again, but I know you're working hard on tolerating the uncertainty.*”