

# Guidelines for Families Living With OCD

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## WHAT TO DO WHEN WHAT WORKS IS NOT WORKING?

In some circumstances, the person with OCD is unwilling or unable to engage in the treatment process. Many families feel they are at a dead end or are held hostage by their loved one's OCD when that individual refuses to participate in treatment. As a result, we've become more interested in helping family members find a way to modify their behavior and feel as though they aren't trapped by OCD. To help families move forward, we've developed a set of guidelines.

### **1) NEVER GIVE UP HOPE!!!**

People change and that includes people with OCD.

### **2) TRY GETTING THE PERSON WITH OCD INVOLVED IN TREATMENT IN SOME WAY.**

It is always best if the person with OCD can get connected to the behavioral therapist in some way even if s/he is refusing treatment. At the very least, encourage her/him to consult with a behavioral therapist — even if it means the therapist goes to her/him so they can understand the rationale for doing behavioral treatment.

### **3) CONSIDER MODIFYING YOUR BEHAVIOR.**

As previously mentioned, most family members are engaging in behaviors that make it easier for the person with OCD to keep his/her symptoms. Consider making it more difficult for the person to live with OCD rather than making it easier.

### **4) EIGHT STEPS TO FOLLOW TO MODIFY YOUR BEHAVIOR:**

#### **Step 1: GET EDUCATED!!!**

Learn about the vicious cycle of OCD and how rituals/passive avoidance actually feed this cycle. Learn ways you are enabling OCD or things you are doing/saying that are not helpful.

#### **Step 2: UNDERSTAND THAT THE PROCESS OF DISENTANGLING ONESELF AS AN ENABLER IS A "PROCESS."**

The most important piece for a family member to understand is that the process of removing oneself as an enabler is not a clear cut issue. A family member isn't going to do all the right things or all the wrong things to help their loved one overcome OCD. It is usually unrealistic and overwhelming for family members to stop accommodating OCD all at once. Therefore, it will likely be more productive to do this in a step-by-step process.

#### **Step 3: CHOOSE ONE THING YOU WILL CHANGE.**

As previously mentioned, it will likely be overwhelming to you and to the person with OCD if you decide to cut out all enabling at once. Once you become aware of all the ways you are facilitating OCD, choose one thing you will no longer do.

#### **Step 4: NOTIFY THE PERSON WITH OCD OF THE CHANGE.**

Tell them what behaviors you will be changing and offer an explanation why. The individual with OCD should not be left in the dark even though they have decided not to participate in behavior therapy. Be clear about your intentions.

#### **Step 5: STICK TO IT!!!**

If you decide to do something, you need to follow through with it. This is a very important piece of behavior therapy. You need to follow through with what you say you will do; otherwise, you will not achieve the desired results. Inconsistent or partial follow-through does not work either.

#### **Step 6: UNDERSTAND THINGS WILL PROBABLY GET WORSE BEFORE THEY GET BETTER.**

For example, if you stop offering reassurance to someone who you have been reassuring on a regular basis, s/he are likely to ask more frequently or more aggressively at first. Once s/he learns that s/he will not get a response, s/he will stop asking.

**Step 7: OFFER SUPPORT.**

Validate the difficulty of having anxiety and challenging OCD. Support her/him in challenging the OCD.

**Step 8: GET YOUR OWN LIFE!!!**

You need and deserve a life of your own. Establish a comfortable living environment that suits your needs not the needs of the person with OCD. Take time for yourself, and plan pleasant activities independent of the family member with OCD.

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