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## Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

Some kids like to wash their hands, but Sarah does it too much. She wants to stop, but her hands just don't feel clean enough and she can't make herself turn off the water. Sometimes she scrubs her hands until they are red and raw. After eating, she feels she has to wash again.

Because she spends so much time washing, Sarah has to rush to get to school on time. At school, she tries not to touch doorknobs or handrails, worrying that if she does she may catch a serious disease. Sometimes, Sarah gets behind in her classwork because she feels that she needs to keep checking it over and over.

During a quiz or test Sarah checks and rechecks every answer and erases anything that isn't perfectly straight or neat. Sometimes she erases so hard it tears the paper, but she can't help it. Sarah gets a bad feeling that if everything isn't exactly right, something terrible may happen. All this worrying, checking, and fixing takes so long that Sarah hardly ever finishes the test before time is up. So even though she knows the work, she often gets an incomplete or even fails.

Sarah tries so hard to hide her habits. She worries that she might be going crazy or that people would think she's weird if they knew what she was doing. Sarah knows that the time she spends washing and checking could be spent having fun with friends or doing her schoolwork, but she can't seem to stop herself. That's because Sarah has **obsessive-compulsive disorder** (OCD).

### What is OCD?

OCD is a type of anxiety (say: ang-**zye**-uh-tee) that happens when there is a problem with the way the brain deals with normal worrying and doubts. Kids with OCD worry a **lot**. And they feel afraid about bad things that could possibly happen.

Like Sarah, some kids with OCD are afraid of getting dirty or catching germs. Others always worry that their parents will get sick or hurt. Others worry that something bad might happen to them. Some kids feel that they have to say things a certain number of times, ask questions over and over again, or keep things super-clean as a way to keep bad things from happening.

Some kids even worry about thinking bad thoughts. They sort of believe that thinking bad things could make them come true.

People with OCD worry so much that they can spend many hours, or even the whole day, worrying about things and trying to make sure the bad things they worry about don't happen.

### Normal Worry or OCD?

Of course, it's normal to worry now and then. Everyone does. Kids may worry about getting lost or that something will happen to their parents. They may sometimes feel afraid that they will get sick or hurt. It's normal for kids to worry once in awhile about burglars, fires, or earthquakes. Sometimes, worrying can help kids learn how to be safe and careful. Normal worries come and go without causing too much of a problem.