

- checking things over and over (such as doors, locks, or stoves)
- doing things a certain number of times (like having to try on five dresses before leaving your room)
- arranging things in a very particular or neat way
- asking the same question over and over
- tying and retying shoes over and over until they feel just right

What Causes OCD?

Obsessive-compulsive disorder isn't contagious, so you can't catch it from someone like you can a cold. Second, kids with OCD have not done anything wrong or bad to get it. It's not their fault that they have it.

Nobody knows exactly how and why some people get OCD, though scientists are beginning to learn about it. Experts know that:

- OCD runs in families. Many kids with OCD have another person in their family who has OCD or another type of anxiety. Exactly how OCD is passed on in a family is not yet known, but scientists are trying to learn about genes that may get passed on that make people more sensitive to worry problems like OCD.
- OCD comes from a problem with the way the mind handles messages about fear and doubt. This problem probably has to do with the chemicals that carry messages to nerve cells in the brain. If the flow of these chemicals gets "blocked," or if there is not enough of them, messages about doubts and worry seem to get "stuck." This leaves a person with a feeling that something's not right and creates lots of worry thoughts.
- In rare cases, OCD can start when the body's immune system responds to a strep infection in a certain way. When OCD starts after a strep infection, the symptoms appear suddenly and very intensely. Most people who get strep infections, though, **don't** get OCD.

Who Gets OCD?

Kids with OCD are not alone. In the United States, about 1 million children and teens, both boys and girls, have OCD. That's about one in every 200 children and teens. You might know someone who has OCD and not even realize it.

Lots of adults have OCD, too. Most adults who have it say the problem started when they were kids and there wasn't much known about OCD. Today, more people understand OCD, and there is better treatment, too.

What's Life Like for Someone With OCD?

Living with OCD can be very hard. Compulsions often take up lots of time and energy, making it hard to finish homework, do chores, or have any fun. Some kids even find it difficult to go to school or make friends. Sometimes kids feel ashamed. They know the behaviors seem silly to other people, so they often keep it to themselves. It's really difficult to talk about OCD! But dealing with something all alone can make it even harder.

Sometimes, even parents and friends who know about a person's OCD have a hard time understanding that OCD is not just a bad habit. They might act impatient or make it seem like a person could just stop if he or she tried hard enough. But with OCD, the need to do rituals can feel too strong to ignore. Some kids say that OCD is like hearing a constant, nagging voice that tells them bad things could happen if they don't do certain things. Some kids say it seems like OCD takes over everything.