



WESTERN SUFFOLK PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

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**PARENT'S
WRAP-UP
SESSION**

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Some Talking Points: Parenting a Child With OCD

- Fred Penzel, Ph.D.

1. Don't think that you really have any control over your child's OCD
2. There is currently no cure, but there is recovery.
3. There are no magical or instant solutions to OCD. Behavioral change is gradual change and takes daily work.
4. The road to recovery has many potholes. No child recovers without some slips and regressions.
5. You can bring a child to treatment, but you cannot force them to participate – not all children or adolescents are ready to recover when we want them to.
6. Systems based upon positive reward are always more motivating and superior to those based upon penalties and punishments, but beware of using distant or massive rewards.
7. Beware of voicing strong feelings of upset, anger, shame, disgust, or depression to your child about the OCD - this will only demoralize them and work against their recovery.
8. If you have a child or adolescent in treatment, allow them to take sole responsibility for their own recovery, unless they are either very young, immature, or have a disability that prevents them from doing so.
9. Some children are unaware of their own behavior.
10. Some children and adolescents use denial to cope with their OCD.
11. Don't fear medication, as it can be a useful tool in some cases.
12. Always believe in their ability to recover. Remember that no one rises to low expectations.

Why Kids Sometimes Do Not Do Well In Treatment

- Fred Penzel, Ph.D.

- They do not believe in their own ability to recover, as their fears are too intimidating.
- They fear therapy will worsen their symptoms.
- They have grown too comfortable in their discomfort.
- They believe their situation is unfair, and they should not have to do anything to recover from it.
- They have a low tolerance for frustration.
- They are also suffering from a severe depression.
- Stress from other areas of their lives, is keeping their symptoms at a high level.
- They suffer from morbid obsessions and believe that their fear is the only thing keeping them from actually doing what their thoughts suggest.
- They may simply not view their symptoms as a problem.
- They deny the seriousness of their disorder, or that they even have a disorder.
- They feel pressured to change and resist doing so out of anger.
- They actually believe they can do it on their own without anyone's help.
- They are in the wrong treatment.

Common Mistakes Parents and Other Family Members Can Make When You Have OCD

- Their idea of helping you with your compulsions is to say, “Why don’t you just stop.”
- They don’t listen when you try to explain that you are not doing it on purpose and honestly don’t know how to stop.
- They don’t understand if you aren’t really upset with yourself about your compulsions.
- They assume that you are always doing compulsions when you are alone.
- When you’re in treatment, they watch you like a hawk, waiting for you to slip, and accusing you of not really trying.
- If you are in treatment, they assume you are not going to do your therapy homework and keep nagging you to do it. If they don’t think you are progressing fast enough, they may even threaten to stop your treatment because you aren’t working hard enough, and it is costing them a lot of money.
- They think that they can control your compulsions. They become overinvolved and think that it is their job to tell you when you are doing them, or they try to take charge of therapy homework that you should be doing for yourself.
- If you are starting to make progress, instead of encouraging you, they’re quick to point out that you are still *sometimes* behaving compulsively.

How Parents Can Help A Child's Efforts In Treatment

- Fred Penzel, Ph.D.

- Be supportive of their efforts to help themselves. Don't take over responsibility for their recovery work.
- Help them to be realistic about slips, and to see that they are a normal part of the process. No one recovers perfectly.
- Praise what they have done, and don't emphasize or criticize what they haven't.
- Expect that they will do their best, even when they don't.
- Try to ignore whatever compulsions they are still doing (unless they affect their health and safety).
- Understand that you do not control their symptoms – only they do.
- Try to curb your impatience at their rate of recovery. Everyone does it at their own pace.
- Try to retain your sense of humor.
- Try to see them as a person who also happens to have OCD. They are not their disorder.
- Remember to forgive yourself for any past mistakes you may have made in dealing with your child's disorder.
- Try to love them unconditionally.

How Parents Can Hinder A Child's Efforts In Treatment

- Fred Penzel, Ph.D.

- Your idea of helping with your child manage a compulsions is to say, "Why don't you just stop?"
- You want them to just stop the whole thing immediately.
- You don't listen when they try to explain that they are not doing it on purpose and don't know how to stop.
- You don't understand if they are not really upset with themselves about their compulsions.
- You assume that they are always doing compulsions when they are alone and tell them so.
- You are always watching them, waiting for them to slip, and then accusing them of not really trying.
- You assume that they are not doing their therapy homework, and constantly nag them to do it.
- If you don't think they are progressing fast enough, you threaten to stop their treatment, because they aren't working hard enough and it is costing you a lot of money.
- You think you can control their compulsions. You think it is your job to point out to them when they are doing them, or try to take charge of therapy they should be doing themselves.
- If they are starting to make progress, instead of encouraging them, you are quick to point out that they are still sometimes behaving compulsively.
- If they are making some progress, you ask how long it's going to take until they're totally recovered, or complain that it's taking too long.
- If they slip, you tell them that they're not trying and will never get better.
- You blame the family's troubles on them and tell them how much easier everyone's lives would be if it weren't for their OCD.
- You constantly remind them about all the bad times, scenes, or embarrassments their OCD has caused them and you in the past.
- You offer them massive rewards (ongoing or one-time) for unachievable improvement.
- You go to their therapy sessions and try to do all the talking.

- When they have a lapse you threaten them with such things as taking away privileges or punishing them in some way.
- You tell people about their symptoms without their permission, and when they are present.
- You think that they will be totally cured some day, instead of recovered.
- If they are struggling with their anxiety and their homework, you feel sorry for them and give them permission to do a compulsion, or even help them to perform it.

WELCOME TO HOLLAND

- Emily Pearl Kingsley

I am often asked to describe the experience of raising a child with a disability to try to help people who have not shared that unique experience to understand it; to imagine how it would feel. It's like this...

When you're going to have a baby, it's like planning a fabulous vacation trip - to Italy. You buy a bunch of guidebooks and make wonderful plans... The Coliseum. Michelangelo's David. The gondolas in Venice. You may learn some handy phrases in Italian. It's all very exciting.

After months of eager anticipation, the day finally arrives. You pack your bags and off you go. Several hours later, the plane lands. The stewardess comes in and says, "Welcome to Holland!"

"Holland!?" you say. "What do you mean? Holland?? I signed up for Italy! I'm supposed to be in Italy. All my life I've dreamed of going to Italy."

But there has been a change in the flight plan. They've landed in Holland and there you must stay. The important thing is that they haven't taken you to a horrible, disgusting, filthy place full of pestilence, famine, and disease. It's just a different place.

So you must go out and buy new guidebooks and you must learn a whole new language. And you will meet a whole new group of people you would never have met.

It's just a different place. It's slower paced than Italy, less flashy. But after you've been there for a while, and you catch your breath, you look around... and you begin to notice that Holland has windmills... and Holland has tulips. Holland even has Rembrandts.

But everyone you know is busy coming and going to Italy... and they are bragging about what a wonderful time they had there. And for the rest of your life you will say, "Yes, that's where I was supposed to go. That's what I had planned."

And the pain of that will never, ever, ever go away... because the loss of that dream is a very, very significant loss.

But... if you spend your life mourning the fact that you didn't get to Italy, you may never be free to enjoy the very special, the very lovely things... about Holland.