

OCD: WHEN OUR THOUGHTS GET STUCK

By Terri Phillips, MFT

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder can be devastating for individuals and for their families. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), OCD can be defined as “intrusive, irrational thoughts-unwanted ideas or impulses that repeatedly well up in a person’s mind”. These unwanted thoughts then lead to compulsions, or repetitive rituals designed in the person’s mind to relieve the persistent, intrusive thoughts. To those with OCD, it may feel like your thoughts are stuck.

The National Institute of Mental Health reports that OCD affects 1% of the adult population but can also affect children. The average age of onset of symptoms is 19 years. Of the 1 % of adults affected, however, 50% of these cases are diagnosed as severe. OCD doesn’t just go away on its own and requires professional intervention.

OCD falls in the family of anxiety disorders and can be accompanied by a great deal of worry, stress and tension. When the brain feels stuck in these intrusive thoughts, anxiety is created and the person seeks to relieve these obsessions. According to John Demos (2005), author of “Getting Started with Neurofeedback”, the excessive beta brain waves or “fast” wave activity creates a loop and the feeling of the brain getting stuck.

The thoughts and obsessions associated with OCD can be quite disturbing. Some of the rituals may include excessive hand washing, picking the skin, putting things in a certain place, doing things in a certain order or repeating things in a certain way. The key to this disorder is that there is anxiety or excessive worry around the obsessions and a need to do something seemingly unrelated to relieve that anxiety.

If you feel you may have symptoms of OCD or someone close to you has these symptoms, a professional evaluation by a Licensed Therapist or MD is an important first step. There are some treatment options that are very successful and can help alleviate these symptoms. One treatment option is that of Cognitive Behavior Therapy or CBT which can help the person identify the disturbing thoughts and disrupt the cycle to manage.

Another treatment option is that of Neurofeedback. In a therapist’s office, the person is connected by sensors to a computer system. This system allows the individual to exercise their brain wave patterns and learn on their own to produce a calm, alert and focused state in their brain rather than the anxious state they are used to.

Neurofeedback has demonstrated positive results in the area of relieving anxiety related to OCD and is a non-invasive form of treatment without the side effects of medication. Neurofeedback can also help regulate sleep patterns which can assist the person in being better able to manage their thoughts and feelings.

The important first step is to get help from a professional as OCD will not go away by itself and can become worse and more difficult to manage. It is also important to realize that you are not alone and there are others who understand how you feel and can help. Honesty with the professional during the evaluation process, no matter how disturbing your intrusive thoughts seem to be, is crucial. Take the first step to feeling better today!

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