

Ask Your Therapist

By Krishnabai, MSW, LICSW, the Ashby Center for Counseling

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder(s)

In a recent, casual conversation I heard someone say “Oh, that’s just my OCD kicking in!” and I thought about how many pieces of psychological information are floating around in the popular pool of consciousness and how few of the pieces are attached to real information about their subject. So this article is my attempt to add clarity to the murky pool of speculation about OCD.

There are two types of Obsessive-Compulsive disorders. The first one is classified as an anxiety disorder (OCD) and the second one is known as Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder (OCPD).

The former (OCD) has either obsessions (recurrent and persistent thoughts, impulses or images such as unrealistic or excessive worries that have no basis in reality) or compulsions (repetitive behaviors such as excessive hand washing, lock checking, stove checking) that are excessive or unreasonable over which the person has no or little control and which causes the person distress. It is common for the person not to recognize that the obsessions or compulsions are excessive or unreasonable.

Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder is the pervasive pattern of preoccupation with orderliness, perfectionism, and mental and interpersonal control that begins in early adulthood. It is characterized by a preoccupation with details, rules, lists, order, etc that interferes with task completion. The person is overly devoted to work, overly conscientious, rigid, and unable to delegate tasks or work with others unless they submit to exactly how things should be done. Finally, the person is a hoarder and is unable to discard worn-out or worthless objects even when they have no sentimental value.

In a very “broad brush” way, I might generalize and say that OCD is a person’s struggle with themselves and OCPD is a person’s struggle with their environment. What is common is that both these struggles cause disruption in the flow of a person’s life to the point of social isolation, being misunderstood by others and causing a lot of heartache. If you know anyone who struggles with either of these conditions, encourage them to seek professional help. There are many new therapies to help folks with these conditions.

As always when I write a column on specific psychological diagnoses, my professional source of information is the American Psychiatric Association’s [Diagnostic Criteria From the DSM-IV.](#)

To read all the prior Ask Your Therapist columns go to www.krishnabai.com where you can also send Krishnabai a general question for her column.

Krishnabai, MSW is a therapist in Ashby and Wellesley Hills where she sees adults, older teens and couples. The core of her work is the discovery and expression of the Authentic Self. She focuses on the identification, expression, and resolution of emotions, commitment to honesty and the use of remedial education and information. The Ashby Center for Counseling 978-827-1181.