

## Children and Adolescents with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder



Public talk for OCD Ireland  
St Patrick's Hospital, Dublin

Dr Gary O' Reilly  
School of Psychology  
University College Dublin

Email: gary.oreilly@ucd.ie  
www.juvenilementalhealthmatters.com

January 21st, 2009

## Outline of the talk

- What is OCD?
- What causes OCD?
- What does a psychological treatment for OCD look-like?
- What evidence is there to say psychological treatment works?

## What is OCD?

“OCD is a condition characterised by distressing obsessional thoughts or impulses on the one hand and compulsive rituals which reduce the anxiety associated with the obsessions on the other.”

Carr (2006)

Carr, A. (2006) The Handbook of Child and Adolescent Clinical Psychology, 2nd Edition. London: Routledge

## Common Obsessions in OCD

- Dirt
- Contamination
- Harmful Catastrophes
- Illness
- Death
- Symmetry
- Order
- Exactness
- Religious Fervor
- Disgust with bodily waste, such as urine, stools or saliva
- Unlucky or lucky numbers
- Forbidden or unacceptable sexual thoughts
- Aggressive or extremely violent urges
- A need to tell, talk, confess

• Considerable distress/anxiety is associated with these thoughts or images

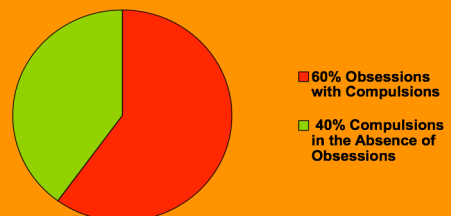
• Particularly distressing as they jar with a child/young person wanting to be good

• Lead to self-doubt, disgust, depression...

## Common Compulsions in OCD

- Washing
- Repeating an action
- Checking
- Removing contaminants
- Touching
- Ordering
- Collecting
- Counting
- Praying
- Constantly seeking reassurance

## OCD in Children



Carr, A. (2006) The Handbook of Child and Adolescent Clinical Psychology, 2nd Edition. London: Routledge

## Features of OCD

- Between 1-2% of children have OCD
- Onset may be as young as 2 years of age but more commonly onset is during late childhood or early adolescence
- OCD may be chronic and continuous or episodic
- 1 in 3 children enjoy full recovery while 1 in ten have a continuous deteriorating course
- The majority of children with OCD have another co-morbid condition, usually tic disorders, anxiety, or depression.

Carr, A. (2006) The Handbook of Child and Adolescent Clinical Psychology, 2nd Edition. London: Routledge

## OCD and willful misbehaviour?

- A feature of OCD in adults is they have insight that their obsessions are irrational
- Most children do too but unlike adult OCD this is not required for formal diagnosis
- Given this insight many children control their OCD in public and store up their compulsions for home.
- This leads some parents to wonder if their child actually has voluntary control of their symptoms and are just being disobedient.
- This is not the case, they are simply responding to their fear of public ridicule to their obsessions and compulsions

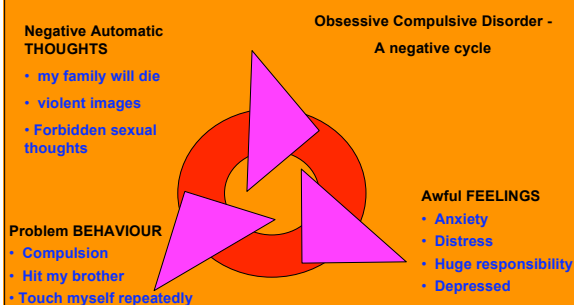
## What causes OCD? - Biological theories

- Genetic vulnerability hypothesis...
  - OCD linked to genetic predisposition
  - Supported by evidence of running in families
  - Unfolds in exposure to environmental factors: stressful life events, parenting styles, childhood infections
- Basal ganglia hypothesis...
  - A structural problem in the brain underpins OCD
- Serotonin hypothesis...
  - Low levels of serotonin in the brain cause OCD
- Autoimmune disorder hypothesis...
  - Streptococcal infection triggers production of anti-bodies that cause abnormalities in the basal ganglia which causes OCD symptoms

## Review...

- Biological vulnerability mixing with environmental factors leading to...
  - Intrusive dangerous thoughts and images...
  - Heightened feelings of anxiety and distress
  - Compulsive actions believed to neutralise that danger and bring relief from distress and safety to loved ones
- What form of psychological intervention could possibly help with this?

## Cognitive Behaviour Theory

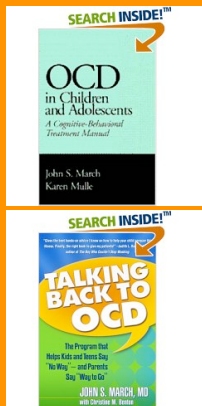


## Central ingredients in most CBT based interventions include:

- An active collaborative therapeutic approach
- Psycho-education regarding the CBT model
- Learning how to become aware of and monitor your thoughts, feelings and behaviour
- Learning new behaviours
- Learning new ways to manage anxiety or unpleasant emotions
- Identification, challenging and testing of thoughts
- Developing new cognitive skills
- Target setting and between session practice
- Positive reinforcement

Stallard (2002, p.11)

Stallard, P. (2002). *Think Good Feel Good: A Cognitive Behavioural Therapy Workbook for Children and Young People*. New York: Wiley



March, J & Mullen, K (1998). *OCD in Children and Adolescents. A Cognitive Behavioural Manual*. New York: Guilford Press

March, J. (2007). *Talking Back to OCD: The Program That Helps Kids and Teens Say "No Way" - And Parents Say "Way to Go"*. New York: Wiley

## Contents of the CBT intervention

- Psycho-education
- Externalising the problem
- Developing a tool-kit for coping with OCD
- Making a map of OCD
- Exposure and response prevention
- Cognitive therapy
- Family involvement
- Relapse prevention and graduation
- Booster session

March, J. (2007). *Talking Back to OCD: The Program That Helps Kids and Teens Say "No Way" - And Parents Say "Way to Go"*. New York: Wiley

## CBT intervention - Psycho-education

- Begin to present the CBT model of OCD to the child
- Explains that the goal of treatment is to provide the child with allies (family, therapist,) and a strategy or battle-plan for "bossing back OCD"
- Provide a clear description of obsessions and compulsions for the child
- Provide a "neurobehavioural" framework for understanding OCD

March, J. (2007). *Talking Back to OCD: The Program That Helps Kids and Teens Say "No Way" - And Parents Say "Way to Go"*. New York: Wiley

## Providing a Neuro-behavioural Framework

*"OCD happens when the 'fear volume control' in the brain is not working properly. So when you should feel a low level of fear, say when you touch something dirty, you actually experience a very high level of fear because the fear volume control button is faulty."*

March, J & Mullen, K (1998). *OCD in Children and Adolescents. A Cognitive Behavioural Manual*. New York: Guilford Press

## Providing a Neuro-behavioural Framework

*"Your brain is like a computer that has a little chip whose job is to alert the brain when there is danger. In OCD the 'fear alerting chip' is not working properly so when it should send out a small or even no signal for danger, such as when you touch something dirty, it actually sends out a BIG DANGER signal. Not surprisingly in doing this OCD makes you feel very worried and sends you a signal to wash your hands extra, extra carefully. These messages are called obsessions. The second part of OCD is the actions it makes you do to make the fear message go away - like washing your hands. These actions are called compulsions and they actually make OCD stronger because you are doing what it wants you to do. Medication can help with the first part of OCD by turning down the volume in that part of your brain. You can help with the second part by bossing OCD back. As we work together I will be like your coach teaching you how to boss OCD back."*

March, J & Mullen, K (1998). *OCD in Children and Adolescents. A Cognitive Behavioural Manual*. New York: Guilford Press

## Key messages

- OCD is not insanity
- OCD is not a sign you're a bad person or dangerous
- OCD is not your fault
- OCD is not your parents/family's fault
- OCD does not mean your brain-damaged!
- You can learn skills to boss back OCD....
- Your parents can shift their role and become your ally against OCD...

March, J. (2007). *Talking Back to OCD: The Program That Helps Kids and Teens Say "No Way" - And Parents Say "Way to Go"*. New York: Wiley

## Externalising OCD

- A key task of March and Yule's approach is to externalise OCD for the child and his family. An important part of this is to ask the child to give OCD a derogatory nickname:
- 'Germ'y'
- 'Touchy'
- 'Stupid'
- 'Trouble'
- Avoid nicknames that make OCD powerful or make the child feel foolish or elicit OCD symptoms.
- Teenagers often prefer to stick to calling it OCD.
- Other fun tasks include drawing pictures of OCD and writing funny poems about OCD.

March, J. (2007). *Talking Back to OCD: The Program That Helps Kids and Teens Say "No Way" - And Parents Say "Way to Go"*. New York: Wiley

## Developing a toolkit

- A Map of OCD
- A "Fear" thermometer and fear hierarchy
- Learning new ways to manage anxiety - relaxation
- A battle plan
- Exposure and Response Prevention - two key tools!
- Learning new ways of thinking

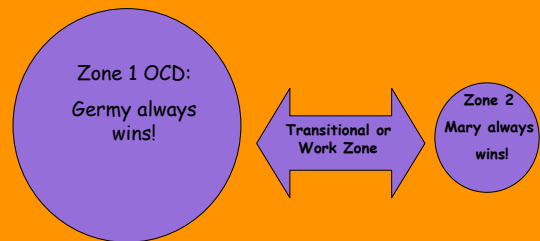
March, J & Mulle, K (1998). *OCD in Children and Adolescents. A Cognitive Behavioural Manual*. New York: Guilford Press

## Mapping OCD

- An OCD map has 3 main zones
- Zone 1 where OCD always wins
- Zone 2 where sometimes OCD wins and sometimes the young person wins
- Zone 3 where the child always wins
- These can be drawn for the child as follows:

March, J & Mulle, K (1998). *OCD in Children and Adolescents. A Cognitive Behavioural Manual*. New York: Guilford Press

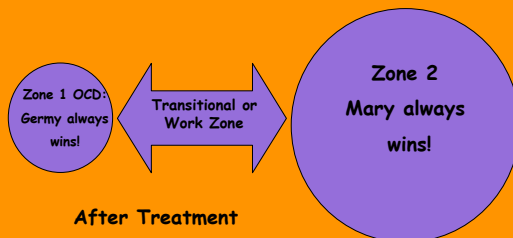
## Mapping OCD



Before Treatment

March, J & Mulle, K (1998). *OCD in Children and Adolescents. A Cognitive Behavioural Manual*. New York: Guilford Press

## Mapping OCD

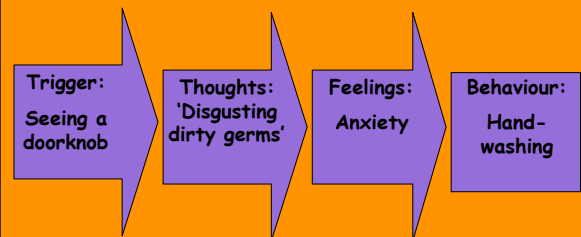


After Treatment

March, J & Mulle, K (1998). *OCD in Children and Adolescents. A Cognitive Behavioural Manual*. New York: Guilford Press

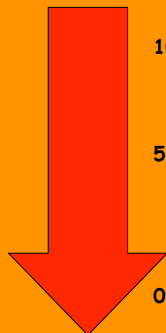
## Mapping OCD

- In mapping OCD care can be taken to help the child see that OCD proceeds from:



March, J & Mulle, K (1998). *OCD in Children and Adolescents. A Cognitive Behavioural Manual*. New York: Guilford Press

### Introducing the Fear Thermometer.



10 MOST FRIGHTENED EVER!

5 MEDIUM SCARY

0 NOT SCARED AT ALL!!!

### Sample Fear Hierarchy

Trigger	Obsession	Compulsion	Fear Temperature
Touching the bathroom sink	'I will get germs on my hands and something bad will happen to anyone I touch'	Wash hands 5 times or avoid touching the sink	9-10
Touching the toilet	'I will get germs on my hands and something bad will happen to anyone I touch'	Wash hands 5 times or avoid touching the sink	9-10

March, J & Mulle, K (1998). *OCD in Children and Adolescents. A Cognitive Behavioural Manual.* New York: Guilford Press

### Sample Fear Hierarchy

Trigger	Obsession	Compulsion	Fear Temperature
Touching a doorknob	'Other people's germs will get on my hands and then something really bad will happen'	Touch the handle a certain way or use a tissue or my shirt sleeve to touch the handle	6
Eating a biscuit with my bare hands	'I will get germs on the biscuit from my hands and get sick and die'	Hold the wrapper over the biscuit while I eat it	5

March, J & Mulle, K (1998). *OCD in Children and Adolescents. A Cognitive Behavioural Manual.* New York: Guilford Press

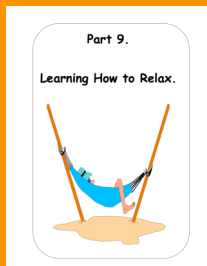
### Sample Fear Hierarchy

Trigger	Obsession	Compulsion	Fear Temperature
Petting the dog	'Rover's germs will get spread everywhere and someone will get sick and die'	Only pet Rover with gloves on or wash hands 5 times after I pet him.	3
Touching an apple	'There are chemicals on the plant and they will make me sick and I will die'	Wash hands 5 times or avoid touching apples	2

March, J & Mulle, K (1998). *OCD in Children and Adolescents. A Cognitive Behavioural Manual.* New York: Guilford Press

### Relaxation and Cognitive Restructuring

- Learning deep relaxation exercises



March, J & Mulle, K (1998). *OCD in Children and Adolescents. A Cognitive Behavioural Manual.* New York: Guilford Press

- Learning how to talk back to OCD

Answering back:

"Get lost OCD, you can't boss me!"

"Oops! There goes another brain hiccup"

"Turn down the volume OCD!"

Cultivating detachment:

OCD is like a cloud comes and goes

OCD is like a fish swimming about in an aquarium

OCD is like a bunch of crazy monkeys up a tree

Cognitive re-appraisal:

### Core of the programme: Exposure and Response Prevention

- Equipped with his/her toolkit the child is now ready to engage in the core component of the programme - Exposure and Response Prevention
- Key messages
  - start with success - intermediate zone of the map
  - remember its hard but not impossible
  - Understand that giving in to OCD during an exposure task makes OCD stronger!
  - Reward your success
  - Work your way through your map until you take full control

March, J & Mulle, K (1998). *OCD in Children and Adolescents. A Cognitive Behavioural Manual.* New York: Guilford Press

### Celebrate your success!

- Reward and encourage through-out the programme
- Recognise the effort made
- Mark key milestones as they are achieved
- Celebrate your completion of the programme

March, J. (2007). *Talking Back to OCD: The Program That Helps Kids and Teens Say "No Way" - And Parents Say "Way to Go"*. New York: Wiley

### Does CBT for OCD work? Cochrane Library Review

- CBT/BT effective form of intervention compared to placebo or waiting list conditions
- CBT/BT and medication equally effective - no evidence that CBT/BT or medication are superior in their effectiveness relative to each other
- CBT/BT combined with medication more effective than either approach alone
- Small drop-out from CBT/BT intervention suggesting children and adolescents tolerate this type of intervention very well

O'Keamey, R.T., Anstey, K.J, von Sanden, C. (2006). Behavioural and cognitive behavioural therapy for obsessive compulsive disorder in children and adolescents. *Cochrane Database of Systemic Reviews*, 2006, Issue 4. Art No. CD004856. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.pub.2

### Does CBT for OCD work? Watson & Rees (2008) Meta-analysis of RCTs

- Randomised Control Trials Only - Treatment V Control
- Participant mean age = 12.06 years
- Mean duration of symptoms = 2.36 years
- 13 Studies in total
- 10 studies Pharmacotherapy V Control (N= 1016)
- 3 CBT V Control (N = 161)
  - Individ CBT v wait list;
  - Group CBT & Individ CBT v wait;
  - Individ CBT v Palcebo pill
- Pharmacotherapy more effective than control (ES = .48)
- CBT more effective than control (ES = 1.45)
- CBT greater ES than Pharmacotherapy

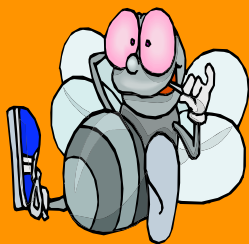
Watson, H. J., & Rees, C. S. (2008). Meta-analysis of randomized, controlled treatment trials for pediatric obsessive-compulsive disorder. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 49 (5) 489-498

### Overheads from this talk...

[www.juvenilementalhealthmatters.com](http://www.juvenilementalhealthmatters.com)

A Teenager's Guide to...

### Thinking Straight.



Contact Details:

[gary.oreilly@ucd.ie](mailto:gary.oreilly@ucd.ie)