Reassurance and OCD: a guide for family and friends

How to support someone with OCD without giving reassurance.

When someone you love is distressed, you want to help. With OCD, the help that comes naturally, answering their questions, checking for them, going along with their rules, gives relief for a moment and makes the OCD stronger. This is not your fault. It is how OCD works.

Ways families get drawn in

- [ ] Answering the same question again and again
- [ ] Checking things for them
- [ ] Washing, cleaning or doing things "their way"
- [ ] Avoiding places, words or topics
- [ ] Waiting while rituals are finished
- [ ] Taking over their responsibilities

What helps instead

- **Agree a plan together, in a calm moment.** Not in the middle of an episode. Their therapist can help with this.
- **Be warm and firm.** You are refusing the OCD, not the person.
- **Reduce gradually.** One thing at a time, by agreement.
- **Notice effort.** Praise the trying, not only the success.

Things you could say

> *"That sounds like an OCD question. I love you, and I am not going to answer it."*
>
> *"I can see how hard this is. I am going to sit here with you while it passes."*
>
> *"We agreed I would not check that. What would help you get through the next ten minutes?"*
>
> *"I believe you can handle this feeling."*

Things that do not help

- Arguing with the logic of the obsession. OCD always has another "but what if".
- Getting angry or telling them to just stop.
- Giving in "just this once" on a bad day. That makes bad days more likely.

Look after yourself too

Living alongside OCD is tiring. Your own support matters.

My notes and questions

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This handout supports your therapy. It does not replace professional advice.