

# loving someone with OCD

## Help for You & Your Family

- Understand how obsessive-compulsive disorder affects a family
- Learn practical tools for coping with symptoms
- Practice compassionate limit setting
- Help your partner recover
- Keep your family happy & balanced

KAREN J. LANDSMAN, PH.D.

KATHLEEN M. RUPERTUS, MA, MS

CHERRY PEDRICK, RN

Foreword by BRUCE HYMAN, PH.D.

“This is the best book available addressing the serious problems that OCD can cause in families. *Loving Someone with OCD* is a uniquely helpful and wonderful book because it provides step-by-step, easily understandable plans for dealing with every problem that commonly arises between OCD sufferers and their loved ones. The format of the book makes developing a successful plan for overcoming family problems a cinch.”

—*Ian Osborn, MD, psychiatrist, assistant professor of psychiatry at the University of New Mexico Health Science Center, and author of Tormenting Thoughts and Secret Rituals: The Hidden Epidemic of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder*

“I am excited to read this book, with its very specific and detailed instructions on how to help a loved one deal with and hopefully recover from his or her OCD. The chapters on designing and implementing family contracts, with their step-by-step directions, should be especially helpful in the day-by-day battle with OCD. This book should also be particularly helpful for those of us who do not have a qualified therapist available for treatment. I recommend that every family with an OCD member—child, sibling, spouse, and so forth—purchase a copy of this workbook. I only wish we had had access to it twenty years ago.”

—*Jacqueline Stout, owner of the online support list Parents of Adults with OCD, sixteen-year member of the Obsessive-Compulsive Foundation, and mother of an adult who has had severe OCD for twenty-three years*

“*Loving Someone with OCD* is a long overdue book that provides solid and accurate information along with extremely practical advice for anyone who has a loved one with OCD. This book is a tremendous resource! I am thrilled to be able to provide this to all families of my patients with OCD. If someone you love has OCD, read this book first.”

—*Mark E. Crawford, Ph.D., licensed clinical psychologist and author of The Obsessive-Compulsive Trap*

“*Loving Someone with OCD* is unique in the literature on obsessive-compulsive disorder because it is not for the person suffering with the disorder—it’s for the family or friends of the sufferer. If you live with or love someone with this problem, this is the one book on the subject you should read. The authors lay out, step-by-step, what a family needs to do to stop supporting the OCD and start supporting the person with OCD while he or she deals with the disorder. This book is the next best thing to bringing a therapist home to live with you.”

—Patricia Perkins, JD, executive director of the *Obsessive-Compulsive Foundation, Inc.*

“All too often the families of those suffering from OCD are ignored. *Loving Someone with OCD* goes beyond other books for families of OCD sufferers; rather than simply providing them with understanding, it gives them the tools to help themselves as well as their loved ones.”

—Jonathan B. Grayson, Ph.D., director of the *Anxiety and Agoraphobia Treatment Center* and assistant clinical professor of psychiatry at *Temple University Medical School*

“This excellent book is just what families need when they are stuck in the web of OCD. It goes beyond simply helping families understand what needs to change by offering a practical, step-by-step guide to doing it. Very easy to read—clear and positive—this book will bring hope and help to many in despair.”

—Aureen Pinto Wagner, Ph.D., clinical associate professor of neurology at the *University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry*, director of the *OCD and Anxiety Consultancy* in Rochester, NY, and author of *What to do when your Child has OCD*, *Up and Down the Worry Hill*, and *Treatment of OCD in Children and Adolescents*



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# Foreword

The tragedy of psychiatric illnesses such as obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is not just in the suffering of those afflicted but also in the profound impact the symptoms have upon all members of the family living in close contact with the person. Families are frequently pushed to the breaking point by the emotional and physical demands made by persistent obsessive thoughts and unabated compulsive behaviors. It is as if a bully has invaded and occupied the home and then imposed its own tyrannical set of arbitrary rules upon the family. It's not uncommon for family members to be "required" to devote hours per day to cleaning, checking, and reassurance behaviors demanded by the person with OCD. Thousands of dollars may be wasted on replacing objects needlessly discarded as "contaminated" or on cleansers used to clean objects until they are deemed "perfectly safe." The tension that results from the day-to-day demands of the disease and the emotional and physical outbursts between family members create a maladaptive environment that further inflames OCD symptoms.

The book you are about to read represents the cumulative thinking from decades of theory, research, and clinical observations attempting to both describe and understand the patterns of family interaction and functioning under the strain of psychiatric illness such as OCD. The book is illuminated by Karen Landsman's and Kathleen Rupertus's personal experiences as expert clinicians treating OCD using cognitive behavioral principles and by Cherry Pedrick's perspective as a person who has recovered from OCD and whose own family was greatly affected by the disease. The resulting volume presents a highly practical and effective approach that gives concerned family members a road map and strategy for effectively reversing the corrosive effects of day-to-day accommodation to the disease. The approach emphasizes an accurate

understanding of OCD and an alliance between family members against the true culprit—the disease of OCD. It fosters improved communication, greater empathy, and cooperation between family members. *Loving Someone with OCD* lays out a collaborative process whereby the family and the person with OCD gradually relinquish automatic accommodation responses to the symptoms and embrace risk taking. By mutually altering the culture of automatic accommodation and keeping the peace, recovery from OCD is possible.

This is a unique book because, while many volumes have been written outlining the basic principles and theories of helping families cope with a mentally ill member, few offer a specific, step-by-step strategy for doing so. A thorough self-examination of your own reactions as a family member to the person with OCD and the symptoms is a large component of the approach. The workbook-style format lends itself to reflection upon maladaptive feelings, attitudes, and reactions that maintain the OCD status quo. This book guides the reader toward more positive responses that counteract the rampant emotionality that fuels counterproductive (quick-fix) responses which further reinforce and imbed OCD symptoms. The persistent overfocus of family members upon the person with OCD and “fixing the problem” fosters a state of neglect of your own mental, physical, and spiritual well-being, which leads to mental burnout, fatigue, and depression. The authors emphasize strengthening individual resilience by finding a healthier balance between self-care and focus on the problem.

While not a substitute for treatment from a qualified mental-health professional trained in the treatment of OCD and families, this book can be safely utilized as a first step toward change. People who are already receiving cognitive behavioral therapy for OCD can use the ideas in the book to further effect changes in home environments that have not been optimally supportive of recovery efforts.

Perhaps the most valuable aspect of the book is the message of hope that unmistakably reverberates through its pages. Family members can make an important difference in affecting the course and outcome of treatment for OCD in a family member. This book provides the knowledge and tools that can be valuable to any family member seeking to support the healing process in his or her loved one. Through careful and conscientious attention to the many pearls contained within this book, combined with qualified professional assistance, family members can successfully reclaim their family from the grip of the OCD.

—Bruce M. Hyman, Ph.D., LCSW  
Director, OCD Resource Center of Florida  
Hollywood, Florida  
[www.ocdhope.com](http://www.ocdhope.com)

**Karen J. Landsman, Ph.D.:** I would like to thank my colleagues and mentors at The Anxiety and Agoraphobia Treatment Center who continually share with me their tremendous insight and knowledge about OCD treatment and my mentors at The University of Maryland Medical School and University of Maryland College Park who provided me with a strong base from which to grow. My heartfelt thanks belong to my patients for sharing their stories and lives with OCD and trusting me to help them. Kathy and Cherry made writing this book an enjoyable, challenging, and creative experience—thank you very much. Finally, I am most grateful for the support and encouragement of my husband and family.

**Kathleen M. Rupertus, MA, MS:** I would like to thank Karen and Cherry for their heartfelt efforts in bringing our ideas and experiences to life through this book. They made this endeavor both a pleasure and a memorable learning experience. I am especially grateful to my mentor, Dr. Jonathan Grayson, who has demonstrated his faith and invested his valuable time and efforts in guiding my professional growth. I would also like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my patients and their families who have allowed me to journey with them out of the depths of OCD. I am especially thankful for the blessings, love, and support of my family; most especially that of my husband, Matt, and my children, Sarah, Matthew, and Rebecca. I am most grateful to God, who has allowed me to transform my own struggles with OCD into triumph and who has encouraged me to use this experience to reach out and share with others.

**Cherry Pedrick, RN:** I am thankful to my husband, Jim, and my son, James, for demonstrating what it means to be truly supportive as I've struggled with OCD. It has been an honor to help Karen and Kathy share their tremendous expertise with families dealing with OCD. Most of all, I thank my God for making it all possible.

We are grateful to Bruce Hyman for his encouragement and contribution to this project. We would like to thank Brady, our editor, who helped us clarify our ideas. We also thank Catharine Sutker and all those at New Harbinger for their encouragement, support, and expertise.



# Introduction

About 2.5 percent of the population, or 6.6 million people, will develop obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) in their lifetime (Niehous and Stein 1997). They aren't the only ones affected. Those numbers jump dramatically when you add family and friends. Obsessive-compulsive disorder affects almost everyone around the person with the disorder. The effects are distinctly different from those of other illnesses. Loved ones, in their desire to help ease the anxiety and distress, are sucked into a lifestyle filled with rituals and avoidance. They often feel boxed into a corner by OCD, almost as much as their loved one who has the disorder.

The main focus of this book is not helping your loved one break free from OCD. That might surprise you! You may have purchased this book for that very reason. The reality is this: you cannot free your loved one; the best therapist in the world cannot free your loved one from OCD. You can help and the right therapy can help, but your loved one will play the most important role in breaking free from OCD. The principal focus of this book is helping you take care of yourself and your family. You'll learn to make changes that will help you break free from the tyranny of OCD. These changes will make it more difficult for your loved one to stay bound by OCD. If your loved one is not pursuing recovery, we'll prepare you to be ready with information as their desire to break free from OCD also grows.

## HOW THIS BOOK CAN HELP

The needs of family members whose loved one is receiving treatment for OCD are quite different from those of family members of someone who has received treatment and is learning the importance of relapse prevention. Your family member may not yet be diagnosed; perhaps you suspect he or she has OCD and you're in the process of collecting information. Throughout the book, we will strive to meet you where you are, providing information for all of these stages: prediagnosis, diagnosis, treatment, and maintenance. This book is not intended as a substitute for family therapy or psychological treatment by a qualified mental-health professional. Rather, it should be used in the following ways:

1. To help family members and friends learn how they can best support their loved one who is working through the process of breaking free from OCD, either with the help of a mental-health professional or through a self-help program, such as the one presented in *The OCD Workbook: Your Guide to Breaking Free from Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder* (Hyman and Pedrick 1999). You'll learn how to best support your loved one's recovery.
2. To assist people whose family member is reluctant to seek professional help for one reason or another. Educating yourself and making significant changes in how you respond to OCD symptoms may encourage a family member to seek help.
3. As a source of information for mental-health professionals who seek a better understanding of the effects of OCD on families and friends of people with OCD. This book can assist you as you provide support for these families.

This book will help you understand OCD, how it is diagnosed, its symptoms, the most effective treatments, and how family members are affected by OCD. It will help you develop a plan of action that can help each family member make positive changes to loosen the grip of OCD on your family. You will also learn the importance of caring for yourself and dealing effectively with stress.

Specific directions for applying the principles in this book are provided for spouses, friends, parents, and adult children of parents with OCD. Obsessive-compulsive disorder is often complicated by other illnesses such as depression, alcohol and drug addiction, trichotillomania, and body dysmorphic disorder. This book will discuss these and problems other family members may have, including OCD of their own. You'll learn how to find appropriate treatment for OCD and how to assess the treatment your loved one is receiving. This book will also give coping strategies for families whose loved ones are refusing treatment.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

### **Karen J. Landsman, Ph.D., Clinical Psychologist**

I am a licensed clinical psychologist specializing in the treatment of anxiety disorders in adults, children, teenagers, and families. Much of my practice is devoted to helping those with OCD and related disorders through the use of cognitive behavioral treatment methods. I present seminars at national and state psychological conferences, as well as write for national and local publications on matters of anxiety, OCD, and related disorders. I am also a member of the Scientific Advisory Board for the New Jersey Obsessive-Compulsive Foundation.

Helping families support a loved one with OCD is an important and rewarding part of my practice. In addition to taking a toll on the person with OCD, families are also substantially impacted by OCD. Reaching for outside help can be difficult for families, but without it, loved ones are not sure how to provide helpful support and are often left feeling discouraged. When people with OCD and their families confront the fears and obsessions of OCD, positive changes are always soon to follow. I am confident that sharing with you through this book will contribute to the health and well-being of your family.

### **Kathleen M. Rupertus, MA, MS**

I am a psychotherapist who has specialized in the treatment of anxiety disorders since 1995. I work with children, adolescents, adults, and their family members at the Anxiety and Agoraphobia Treatment Center in Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania. My true passion is working with people who have OCD because I have had my own personal experience with OCD. As surprising as it may sound, I am truly thankful that OCD has been a part of my life. Even if I was somehow given the chance to have lived life *without* OCD, I wouldn't choose it. My painful struggle and eventual triumph over OCD has helped prepare me for where I am now in both my personal and professional life. I have learned and can teach others that there is joy and peace beyond the darkness of OCD.

Your loved one with OCD is fortunate that you have committed yourself to becoming a part of the recovery process. After reading this book and completing the exercises, you and your loved one will be in the position to fight OCD through cooperation, dedication, and the use of proven behavioral strategies. Together, you and your loved one will become a powerful team. With that approach, OCD doesn't stand a chance.

## Cherry Pedrick, RN

After twenty years working as a registered nurse, I made a career change. In 1995, I was diagnosed with OCD and applied cognitive behavioral therapy principles to break free. Writing helps me continue my progress keeping OCD at bay. I wrote several articles, then coauthored *The OCD Workbook* with Bruce Hyman, Ph.D., in 1999. Dr. Hyman and I teamed up again to write *Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder* and *Anxiety Disorders*, books to help teens understand OCD and other anxiety disorders. I also coauthored *The Habit Change Workbook* and *The BDD Workbook* with James Claiborn, Ph.D., and *Helping Your Child with OCD* with Lee Fitzgibbons, Ph.D.

Over the years, I've met many families struggling with OCD. My husband Jim and son James have been very supportive of me as I've dealt with OCD. I've witnessed the toll of OCD on their lives and recognize the great need family members like them have for support, knowledge, and a plan of action for meeting the challenge of living with OCD. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to assist Dr. Karen Landsman and Kathy Rupertus as they draw on their many years of experience with families struggling with OCD.

# Chapter 1

## OCD Defined

Do you feel like your home has been invaded? If you're living with someone with obsessive-compulsive disorder, in a way, it has been. You've been confronted by OCD, and your family needs to face the challenge as allies against a common opponent. OCD can be a brutal tyrant, demanding steadily increasing hours, money, and anguish. The goals of this book are to help you discover and confront how OCD is affecting you, to help you examine your relationship with the person with OCD and your family life, and to help you take positive steps toward a healthier, more constructive relationship with the person with OCD. This book will help you break free from the tyranny of OCD in your family.

You may be new to psychiatric illness and OCD, or perhaps it's been an ongoing struggle. Your loved one may be denying he or she even has OCD or may be finished with a course of treatment and struggling to prevent relapse. Wherever you are, the first step toward breaking free from the hold OCD has on your family is education. You need to know your opponent, OCD. This chapter will provide you with basic information about OCD: its definition, cause, and symptoms. Chapter 2 will give you a brief overview of the treatment of OCD.

We urge you to learn more about OCD and its treatment so you will know what your loved one is going through. *The OCD Workbook: Your Key to Breaking Free from Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder* (Hyman and Pedrick 1999) is an excellent place to start your pursuit of knowledge. There are a great many other excellent resources, and we've listed many in the resources section. With education, you'll be more equipped to provide support, help evaluate treatment options, and examine your response to OCD.

Knowledge of OCD and improved communication with your loved one will help you put the problems you're facing in perspective. With increasing knowledge and greater perspective, you'll be ready to make some important changes. Education and communication will provide a new perspective for understanding OCD symptoms and the ill-fated strategies family members have been using to deal with the symptoms. As you discover how OCD affects your family, you'll learn to change the way you respond to OCD symptoms. Healthier responses will help you break free from the effects of OCD. As you'll see, most of your changes will also make an impact on how your loved one handles OCD symptoms. Your gradual withdrawal from participating in rituals and avoidance, for example, will mean big changes in his or her response to obsessions.

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## WHAT IS OCD?

Obsessive-compulsive disorder is a neurobiobehavioral disorder characterized by obsessions and/or compulsions that are distressful, time-consuming, or interfere with routine daily functioning or relationships with others. Saying a disease is a *neurobiobehavioral disorder* means that it involves both dysregulation of the chemistry and circuitry of the brain and dysfunctional, learned patterns of thought and behavior. Mental-health professionals rely on the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR)* to diagnose psychiatric illnesses. It states the following: "The essential features of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder are recurrent obsessions or compulsions that are severe enough to be time consuming (i.e., they take more than one hour a day) or cause marked distress or significant impairment. At some point during the course of the disorder, the person has recognized that the obsessions or compulsions are excessive or unreasonable" (American Psychiatric Association [APA] 2000, 456-457).

*Obsessions* are persistent thoughts, impulses, ideas, or images that intrude into a person's thinking and cause excessive worry, anxiety, and distress. The thoughts are not what the person would expect or want to have, and he or she feels little control over them. Even so, the person does understand that the thoughts are a product of his or her own mind and are not imposed by others.

*Compulsions* are repetitive behaviors or mental acts that are performed in response to obsessions in order to relieve or prevent worry, anxiety, and distress. There may also be a vague goal of preventing or avoiding a dreaded event such as death, illness, or harm coming to self or others. Often the compulsions are unconnected to what they are meant to prevent. For example, turning a light switch on and off a lucky number of times may serve to keep a loved one safe from harm. This form of OCD is referred to as "magical thinking." When compulsions are logically connected to the feared outcome, such as hand washing to remove germs, they are clearly excessive. Repetitive mental acts can include counting, repeating words silently, praying, or going over events. Repetitive behaviors can include any type of behavior and are often called *rituals*. An important distinction between OCD and addictions is this: no gratification or pleasure is derived from compulsions. People with OCD get anxiety relief but no enjoyment from their compulsions.

## Types of OCD

The obsessions and compulsions of OCD come in a variety of forms. Here, they are divided according to the type of compulsion. While some people have just one type of compulsion, many have symptoms from two or more categories. Often, you can also see a theme running through the obsessions. One person could have a general fear of harm or contamination coming to him- or herself, while another could have a fear of causing harm to others by doing something or neglecting to do something.

### Checking

People with checking compulsions have irrational fears of harm coming to themselves or others if they don't engage in certain behaviors. They check such things as door locks, household appliances, stereo equipment, homework, and bills. Some people check on the health or well-being of others. Checking relieves the anxiety and distress of obsessive thoughts—at first. But the obsessive thoughts and worries soon return, and the person feels a need to check again. Over time, continued checking calls for more and more checking, accompanied by less relief.

Obsessive fears are usually related to the items checked, such as checking a light switch to make certain a light is off or turning a doorknob to make certain a door is locked. Sometimes, however, the fears and items checked are totally unrelated and have a magical quality, as in magical thinking. A person might have a fear that if electrical wires are touching, a loved one will get sick.

### Washing and Cleaning

People with washing and cleaning compulsions engage in cleaning rituals in response to obsessions about contamination by germs, viruses, dirt, bodily fluids, chemicals, or other foreign substances. They relieve the distress caused by obsessive thoughts by washing their hands, showering, or cleaning things around them. They often demand that other family members participate in laundry or cleaning rituals. Over time, washing and cleaning brings less relief of anxiety, and rituals increase.

### Ordering and Repeating

Some people with OCD relieve anxious thoughts by arranging certain items in particular ways. They may get upset if their personal belongings are rearranged and even insist that furniture in the house be arranged in a certain way. Over time, the demands for order continue to increase. There may also be a compulsion for symmetry or for the need to have certain things even. What if things are not in order or even? The result might be a vague feeling of uneasiness. It may include an aspect of magical thinking, such as fear of harm coming to a loved one or some disaster occurring. Others repeat routine activities over and over until they “feel right” or complete. They may do