



The Parent's Guide

✿ OCD

Your child and OCD

A warm, practical guide for the parent of a child caught in frightening thoughts and rituals: how to see the fear underneath the behaviour, gently step back from the rituals, take small brave steps together, and know when to get help.

Who this is for: the parent or carer of a child caught in worries and rituals.

Cited: peer-reviewed research and national guidance.

Languages: English, Hindi, Marathi, and Kannada.

Read it free at weave.clinic/family

1

✿ IS THIS MY CHILD

Is this my child, or is this a stuck worry?

✿ IN SHORT

The endless "are you sure?" The hand-washing that will not stop. The bedtime that has grown a long list of steps that must be done in exactly the right order. If this is your home, you are not a bad parent and your child is not being difficult on purpose. Something real is going on, and it has a shape.

Maybe it is the same scene most nights. Your child asks the same question five, ten, twenty times, and each answer buys only a minute of calm. Or the tap runs and runs while small hands scrub, long after they are clean. Or a light switch, a prayer, a word, has to be repeated until it feels "just right", and the tears come if it is interrupted. You have answered, reassured, and hurried them along, and still it circles back.

Here is the first thing to know. What looks like a stubborn habit is often a frightened child trying to make an unbearable feeling go away. A child caught like this is not rare, and is not being naughty. This kind of stuck fear and ritual is a recognised condition of childhood, one that doctors understand well.

Only a doctor or a trained clinician can say what is really going on, and this booklet puts no label on your child. What you can do today is simpler and just as powerful: learn to see the fear underneath the behaviour, and start meeting it in a way that actually helps.

1 to 3 in 100

children live with this kind of stuck fear

A child caught in worries and rituals is far from the only one. This is a recognised, understood condition, not rare and not a child's fault.



The same question, again and again, and a small hand that cannot let the worry go.

For many children, the fear gathers around one thing: germs, a locked door, a loved one getting hurt, a bad thought they cannot un-think. A worry arrives and feels like an emergency, so the child does something to make it stop, checks, washes, asks, repeats. It works for a moment. Then the worry comes back, and the whole thing starts again. From the outside it can look like fussiness or drama. Underneath, it is a child bracing against something that feels genuinely dangerous.

There is real relief in learning that this has a shape and a name that professionals know well, and that there are clear, tested things that help. You do not have to guess your way through it alone. The rest of this booklet walks you through what this fear actually is, what your child feels underneath it, and the small moves at home that make the biggest difference.

● TRY THIS

For the next two days, just notice, without changing anything yet. What is the worry about, and what does your child do to make it feel better? When is it worst, and when does it ease? You are not fixing anything. You are learning the shape of your own child's fear.

2

✿ WHAT IT IS, WHAT IT IS NOT

What it is, and what it is not

✿ IN SHORT

It is a scary stuck thought, plus a ritual to make the fear go away. The relief the ritual brings is real, but it is brief, and the ritual grows. This is not naughtiness, not superstition, not attention-seeking, and it is not something you caused.

It helps to see the two parts clearly. First comes the frightening thought, the worry that arrives on its own and will not leave: a fear of germs, of harm, of something being wrong, or a dark "what if" that horrifies the child. Then comes the ritual, the thing the child does to push the fear away: washing, checking, counting, repeating, or asking you to promise it is fine.

And here is the cruel trick at the centre of it. The ritual works for a moment, and that moment of relief is exactly what teaches the fear to come back. Each time the worry is answered with a ritual, the brain learns that the ritual was necessary, so the next worry feels even more urgent. The relief gets shorter. The rituals get longer. Slowly, they can swallow an evening.



For months I thought she was just being fussy about germs. The day I understood she was terrified, not difficult, I finally stopped snapping and started helping.

A mother, Hubli

This is why the usual responses do not work. Scolding a child for a ritual is scolding them for the one thing that quiets a fear they cannot control, so it adds shame without removing the fear. And giving in, doing the ritual for them or answering the worry one more time, calms things now and feeds the fear for later. Neither the firm hand nor the endless reassurance breaks the cycle, because the cycle is not about discipline at all.

It is also not something you did. This kind of stuck fear runs in families, carried through inherited biology as much as through anything that happens at home. It is not caused by bad parenting, by too many screens, by a strict grandparent, or by a child being spoiled. If you recognise a thread of this in your own childhood or in a relative, that is common, and it is not a character flaw.

REMEMBER

The ritual is the fear talking, not your child choosing to defy you or waste your time. Naming it as fear, out loud and to yourself, is the first step to staying patient when it is hard.

More, if you want it 

Separating the fear from the child does not mean nothing is expected of them. It means you stop treating a frightened child as a badly behaved one, and start treating the fear as the problem you both face together. "Your brain is telling you this is dangerous, and I know it feels real, and I also know you are safe" is a sentence a child can slowly learn to trust, far more than "stop being silly".

3

✿ WHAT YOUR CHILD FEELS UNDERNEATH

What your child feels underneath

✿ IN SHORT

Under the ritual is a doubt that will not settle and a fear that feels like danger. Often there is shame too, and secrecy, because the thoughts feel wrong or embarrassing. This is why "just stop" cannot work.

Picture the engine that drives it. A doubt arrives, "did I really lock it", "are my hands really clean", "what if I hurt someone", and it does not fade the way a passing thought should. It sticks, and it feels urgent, like a real emergency. The child cannot simply decide to believe the door is locked. The doubt keeps whispering "but are you sure?", and the only thing that quiets it, for a moment, is the ritual.

And here is the part that keeps it hidden. Many children feel deep shame about the thoughts, so they hide the rituals and suffer in silence. The scariest obsessions are often the ones a child would never act on, thoughts about harm or about something taboo, and because the thoughts feel so wrong, the child believes they must be bad or dangerous for having them. They are not. Those distressing thoughts are a known feature of the condition, not a sign of who the child is.

This is why "just stop it" cannot work, however reasonable it sounds. You cannot talk a doubt away, because the doubt is not built on logic, and you cannot shame a child out of a fear their own brain is generating. Telling a frightened child to stop only teaches them to hide it better, and to feel more alone with it.

When you can see the doubt and the shame underneath the behaviour, everything changes. The washing is not defiance, it is a child trying to feel safe. The endless questions are not manipulation, they are a child begging the fear to please, finally, be quiet. Your calm understanding is worth more here than any clever argument, because it tells the child the one thing the fear denies: you are not bad, and you are not alone in this.

● TRY THIS

Next time your child is gripped, try naming the feeling instead of arguing with the thought. "Your worry is really loud right now, and I can see how scary it feels. I am right here." You are not agreeing the danger is real. You are showing your child that a frightening feeling can be met calmly and survived.

4

✿ WHAT ACTUALLY HELPS AT HOME

What actually helps at home

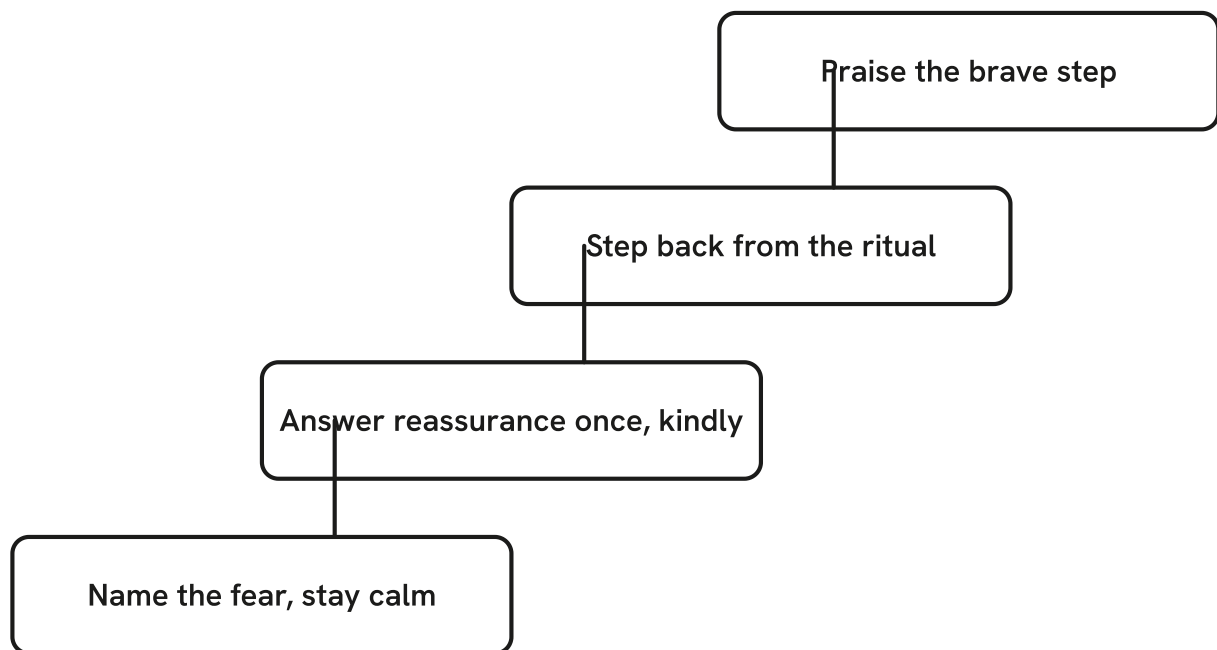
✿ IN SHORT

The move that helps most feels wrong at first: gently step back from doing the rituals and answering the endless reassurance. Support your child to face the fear in small brave steps, praise the brave step, and do not argue with the thought. Connection comes before correction.

Start with the hardest and most helpful idea. Every time the family performs the ritual for the child, or answers the same worry for the twentieth time, it calms things for a moment and quietly feeds the fear. This bending of family life around a child's fear is so natural, and so kind, that most parents do it without noticing. Gently reducing it, step by step, is one of the most powerful things you can do.

You are not being unkind by easing off the reassurance, you are handing your child back their own strength.

So the goal is to support, not rescue. Rescuing removes the fear for the child; supporting helps the child face it while you stand close. You do this slowly and together, one small brave step at a time, never a giant leap. Wash one time fewer today. Answer the worry once, kindly, then hold the line with warmth. Leave the door checked just once and walk away together while the fear is still loud, and wait, and let the child feel it come down on its own.



Step back from the ritual, one move at a time. Start with your own calm, ease off the reassurance, and build up to praising a small brave step.

Name the fear and stay calm before anything else.

Answer the reassurance once, kindly, then gently hold.

Step back from doing or helping with the ritual.

Praise the brave step, not the ritual or the asking.

Two more moves matter. Do not argue with the thought. You cannot win a debate with a doubt, and trying only gives it more airtime. Instead of proving the worry wrong, you help your child sit beside it without acting. And praise the brave step, not the reassurance. "You waited and let the worry get smaller by itself, that was so brave" teaches the exact skill the fear is fighting. Notice the trying, out loud, every time you can.

Support, do not rescue.

Do not do the ritual for them or answer the worry again and again. Stand beside your child while they face a small piece of the fear, and let them feel themselves cope.

One small step.

Break it into tiny stages, one fewer wash, one unanswered "are you sure", a single check instead of ten. Slow is not failure, slow is how bravery is built.

Do not argue with the thought.

You cannot reason a doubt away. Skip the debate, and help your child let the worry be there without acting on it.

Praise the brave step.

Name the effort, not the outcome. "You let the worry get smaller on its own" is the sentence that grows courage.

The evidence here is strong, and it is hopeful. The treatment that works best for this condition is a talking therapy that helps a child face fears in small steps without doing the ritual, and what you do at home, easing off the accommodation and praising the brave step, is the same medicine in everyday form. What you do genuinely matters.

● TRY THIS

Pick one ritual or one repeated worry this week, just one. Warn your child kindly in advance: "Tonight we will check the door one time, together, and then we will read our story." Stay calm and close, expect the fear to rise, and praise the trying afterwards. Small and steady beats big and forced every time.

5

✿ LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF AND THE FAMILY

Looking after yourself and the family

✿ IN SHORT

This is a marathon, not a sprint. The rituals can pull the whole family in, exhaust you, and quietly draft brothers and sisters into the fear. Your own rest and support are part of the treatment, not a luxury.

Living alongside this is genuinely tiring, and the exhaustion you carry is real. Rituals can take over a household: the extra hour before school, the questions that never end, the routines everyone learns to tiptoe around. Being pulled into the fear, again and again, wears a parent down. Your own rest and support are part of helping your child, not something you have to earn first. A depleted parent cannot stay calm, and calm is exactly what your child needs most.

Watch, too, how the fear can quietly reorganise the whole family. Brothers and sisters often get drafted in, asked to do the ritual a certain way, to answer the worry, to keep the peace by not upsetting the routine. It is easy for their needs to slip to the edges while everything bends around one child's fear. The family works best as a calm team facing the fear together, not one child's rituals ruling the house.

♥ IN YOUR CORNER

If it ever tips into "I cannot keep doing this", that feeling is common and reachable, not a failure. You are allowed to be tired, and you are allowed to need support of your own. The crisis card linked below has people you can talk to, any time.

Remember that this kind of fear often runs in families. Sometimes a parent reading a booklet like this recognises their own childhood on the page, the same checking, the same private dread. If it feels extra hard for you to hold your nerve and ease off the reassurance, that may be the same wiring at work, not a weakness. Be as kind to yourself as you are learning to be with your child.

And share the load. In many of our homes the pressure multiplies, with relatives ready to blame your parenting, compare your child to cousins, or insist a firmer hand is all that is needed. That commentary is not the truth, and you do not have to win every argument. A short, steady line helps: "The doctor is helping us with this, and we are following a plan." Then find one person who is truly on your side, a partner, a sister, a friend, and say the hard, tired parts out loud. The shame and the loneliness both thrive in silence, and neither survives long once you are not carrying this alone.

More, if you want it ^

Bring the family gently onto the same page. If siblings have been drafted into the rituals, they can be quietly released, kindly and without blame, as part of the plan. If a grandparent means well by answering every worry, they can be shown the new approach: answer once, warmly, then hold. A household that responds in one calm, consistent way gives your child far more than one where some people rescue and others scold. You do not need everyone to be perfect. You need enough of the home pulling the same way.

● TRY THIS

This week, choose one small thing that is only for you, half an hour with a friend, a walk, an early night, and take it without guilt. Then think of one person you could bring onto the team, and tell them one specific way they could help.

6

✿ WHEN TO GET HELP, AND CRISIS

When to get help, and crisis

✿ IN SHORT

Reach out when the thoughts and rituals start eating real time, an hour a day or more, or stop normal life like school and sleep, or when your child seems despairing. A talking therapy that helps children face their fears is the recommended first step, and a doctor decides about any medicine.

It is worth seeing a doctor or a child mental health professional when the rituals start taking up real time, around an hour a day or more, or when the fear stops your child going to school, sleeping, eating, or joining normal family life. Many families wait far too long, often held back by shame and by hoping it will simply pass. Reaching out early is not an overreaction. It is one of the wisest things a parent can do, and earlier help tends to mean better outcomes.

And help genuinely works. The recommended first step is a talking therapy that helps a child face their fears in small steps, and it helps a great many children.

Sometimes a doctor may also discuss medicine as one option, weighed carefully case by case with your family, but that is a clinical decision for a doctor to make with you, never an automatic step and never something to start or stop on your own. A good clinician looks at the whole child, and the plan is a conversation that gets adjusted, not a one-time verdict.

There is one situation that needs a different kind of attention right away. If your child ever talks about not wanting to be here, about hurting themselves, or about wanting to disappear, or if the distress from the thoughts becomes unbearable, take it seriously and stay close. Do not leave them alone, gently remove access to anything dangerous, and reach out for help the same day. These words and these moments are always worth acting on, even when part of you hopes they did not mean it.

You can call **Tele-MANAS on 14416** any time, day or night, for free mental health support across India, in your own language. In an immediate emergency, go to the nearest hospital. Asking for help is a sign of strength, not failure, and it is one of the bravest things a parent can model for a frightened child.

 REMEMBER

You do not have to carry this alone, and you were never meant to. See the fear underneath the ritual, step back gently instead of feeding it, take small brave steps together, and reach for help early. A child caught in worries and rituals, with a calm and steady parent beside them, can learn that the doubt can rise and pass without being obeyed.



The same young mind that learned to treat a thought as an emergency can, with patient help and a steady parent beside it, learn to let the worry pass. Rarely in one clean moment, almost always in many ordinary, gradually quieter ones.

● TRY THIS

Write down two things and keep them on your phone. One: the single ritual or worry you would most want to ask a doctor about, with a real example. Two: the Tele-MANAS number, 14416. Two small moves, one toward understanding and one toward help, are how the road forward begins.

WHERE THIS COMES FROM

Boileau B. A review of obsessive-compulsive disorder in children and adolescents. *Dialogues Clin Neurosci*, 2011. doi.org/10.31887/DCNS.2011.13.4/bboileau

Lebowitz ER. Comparing family accommodation in pediatric obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety disorders, and nonanxious children. *Depress Anxiety*, 2014. doi.org/10.1002/da.22251

Pediatric OCD Treatment Study (POTS) Team. The Pediatric OCD Treatment Study (POTS): a randomized controlled trial of cognitive-behavior therapy, medication, and their combination for children and adolescents with obsessive-compulsive disorder. *JAMA*, 2004. doi.org/10.1001/jama.292.16.1969

Geller DA. Practice parameter for the assessment and treatment of children and adolescents with obsessive-compulsive disorder. *J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry*, 2012. doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2011.09.019

Hettema JM. A review and meta-analysis of the genetic epidemiology of anxiety disorders. *Am J Psychiatry*, 2001. doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.158.10.1568

Vigne P. Duration of untreated illness in a cross-diagnostic sample of obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic disorder, and social anxiety disorder. *CNS Spectr*, 2019. doi.org/10.1017/S1092852918001281

FURTHER READING

- International OCD Foundation: a resource for families of children and teens with OCD

This guide helps you recognise and understand. It is not a diagnosis. For that, see a professional.

-
- Feeling like it is all too much? **Read the crisis card.** Help is one page away.