



Tips for Accommodating Students with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

Strategies to Consider or Explore:

- Allow more time for completing tasks and tests. Other testing accommodations may include testing in an alternate location, providing breaks during testing, and allowing the student to write directly on the test booklet (see below). In some cases, you may need to allow the student to take tests orally.
- For students with compulsive writing rituals, consider limiting handwritten work. Common compulsive writing rituals include having to dot i's in a particular way or retrace particular letters ritualistically, having to count certain letters or words, having to completely blacken response circles on test forms, and erasing and rewriting work until it looks perfect. Scantron forms may be particularly problematic for a student who feels that s/he has to perfectly darken in each circle -- in such cases, a reasonable test accommodation would be to have the student circle their answers or record their answers directly in the test booklet. If writing lecture notes is problematic, the student may need to tape record lectures or the teacher may need to arrange for providing the student with a hard copy outline of the lecture notes. Alternatively, if the student's compulsions are not triggered by keyboarding, have the student use a notebook computer or word processor to record lecture notes.
- For students with compulsive reading rituals, consider limiting the amount to be read or breaking it up into chunks. If reading rituals and intrusive thoughts are severe, consider going to books on tape or recording the material for your student to listen to. In some cases, having someone else read aloud to the student may work, but older students may feel frustrated and demoralized by that.
- If the student has perfectionistic traits, they may stay up all night working and reworking an essay or paper. Talk to the parent to find out if this is happening so that you don't inadvertently reinforce the problem by complimenting the student on the 'perfect' work. If the problem is severe, you may need to contract with the student as to how much reworking is allowed or you may need to establish a system whereby they turn their work in at the end of the school day and not take it home as 'homework.'
- During a quiet discussion, consult with the student and inquire as to what support he or she needs from you. Ask whether gentle refocusing and redirection would be welcomed. By working collaboratively with your student, you will find out what techniques help your student and what may

trigger emotional responses. Keep in mind that it will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the child to interrupt or stop a ritual once it has begun.

- Try to reduce triggers to compulsive rituals, if possible. If you know that a student will "have to" engage in a ritual if they see the pencil sharpener, can you put the sharpener out of sight? If they "have to" touch people, can you take one step back so that the intensity of the trigger is reduced for them?
- Be alert to peer problems or teasing or harassment associated with compulsive rituals. If the student is being ridiculed for their rituals or obsessive fears, consider conducting a peer education program on OCD. The OC Foundation has a 45-minute film called "The Touching Tree" that may be appropriate for younger students.
- Conference privately with the student when they are not "stuck" to figure out some "graceful exit" excuses that they or you can use to help them get out of the classroom without attracting peer attention. Consider giving the student a "permanent pass" that they can use to leave the classroom without calling attention to himself or herself if they need to go speak with the counselor or to take a walk to help get "unstuck."
- If the student is having trouble retrieving information or facts that they have learned, a "free recall" procedure where you simply ask a question and they have to answer is likely to underestimate the extent of their knowledge. Using multiple choice questions or providing a word bank will increase their ability to show you what they know.
- The educational team, in collaboration with the student, parents, and outside treating professionals should determine how to handle late assignments. Some sources recommend always allowing students with OCD to submit assignments late without penalty, but if there is too little structure or limits, the student may not be able to get themselves to turn the work in. This, too, needs to be handled on a case-by-case basis.