Treating Obsessive Compulsive Disorder In Very Young Children

Dr. Joelle Beecher McGovern
Child & Adolescent OCD, Tics, Trich, & Anxiety Group (COTTAGe)
University of Pennsylvania, School of Medicine

Agenda
Cognitive Behavioral Model of Treatment
• Psychoeducation
• Cognitive Training
• Mapping/hierarchies
• Exposure and Response Prevention
• Relapse Prevention

What is OCD?

Obessions
Persistently recurring thoughts, impulses or images that are intrusive, inappropriate, distressing.
False alarm

Compulsions
Repetitive behaviors or mental acts that a person performs in response to obsessive thoughts; to neutralize (reduce distress, prevent a dreaded outcome).
Neutralizing response to false alarm

Avoidance serves same function as Compulsions, common in young children:
Not doing something to prevent the false alarm from occurring

Compulsions are not pleasant, children do not want to do them, they feel driven to because rituals relieve anxiety
**Differentiating OCD**

**From Normal Childhood Rituals**
- Timing
- Content
- Function
- Severity & related impairment

**From Other Disorders**
- Do obsessions increase anxiety?
- Do compulsions function to decrease anxiety?
- Compulsions are not enjoyable
- OCD is often "nonsensical"
- "JUST RIGHT" feeling

---

**Explaining Obsessions and Compulsions**

**Obsessions**
- Trick or truth?
- Glitch
- Scary movie/book
- Illusions
- "What if" box example

**Compulsions**
- Bully
- Younger sibling

Support adults: validate how real it feels.

---

**The Cycle of OCD**

- Obsessive Thoughts: Persistent thoughts, images or urges
- Uncomfortable emotional & physiological arousal: Anxiety, discomfort, fear, disgust, heart racing, can't breathe, stomachache, etc
- Temporary Relief: Distress subsides temporarily
- Compulsions: Escaping avoidance of feared thoughts or outcomes/consequences
- Negative Reinforcement: Distress stays in long run
The Vicious Cycle of Avoidance

But anxiety stays high long-term.

Avoidance temporarily relieves anxiety.

Breaking the Cycle of OCD: Importance of Response

Uncomfortable emotional & physiological arousal:
Anxiety, discomfort, fear, disgust
Heart racing, can’t breathe, stomachache, etc

Distress may initially increase but will subside within and across time.

Stay/Approach: **Boss Back**

Decrease in intensity and frequency of Obsessive Thoughts/Anxiety in the long run.

Outcome of Repeated Exposure

PANIC PEAK
EXPOSURE, Habituation
HABITUATION, Exposure
MASTERY OF ANXIETY

Copyright 2000 Aureen P. Wagner, PhD
Creative Ways To Help Young Children Understand The Model

- Role play with score keeping - rotate roles; identify obsessions, compulsions, bossing back, feeding, help parent with scaffolding
- Act out with puppets, act out with characters, write story, write song, movie clips
- White boards
- Non-Verbal: Pictures, writing words, charades

Externalizing and Identifying OCD Through Storytelling

She named her OCD the goblin because these thoughts made her feel worried and to feel like she had to do something to make the worry go away. The goblin thoughts told her there might be a tornado she and her family may get hurt so she shouldn't go outside if it is even a little bit windy and if she does, she should ask her mom repeatedly if a tornado is coming so she would know they were safe.

Creative Data Collection

[Image of data collection form]
Exploring OCD Through Drawing

A Simplified Theoretical Approach

“Blah, blah, blah, do the thing you’re afraid of,
Blah, blah, blah, the more you do it, the easier it gets.”

Gwen Franklin, age 6, to her father, 2001

OCD Differences in Young Children

- Emotion regulation
- Verbalizing the problem
- May be oppositional or in denial
- Insight
- Sensory
- Accommodation makes OCD bearable for the child, therefore less dysfunction may be present
- Accommodation is often a factor in maintaining the symptoms
What is OCD taking away?

“I’ll stay here, not budging! I can and I will
If it makes you and me and the whole world stand still!”
Well...
Of course the world didn’t stand still. The world grew.
In a couple of years, the new highway came through
And they built it right over those two stubborn Zax
And left them there, standing un-budged in their tracks.”
Dr. Seuss

Motivation: Tap an Interest

Support Team: Building Alliances

Child Anxiety/Avoid
Family
School
Child Anxiety/Avoid
Family
School
Child
Family
School
Anxiety/
Avoidance

Not helpful
Helpful
Create Hierarchy For Exposure Practices

Not Just Right

Give picture with mistake to friend: 4
Brush teeth after dressed: 5
Same, in favorite outfit: 5
Doing homework (15 min), leave NJR things: 5
Color not right: 5, words: 5
Pick color in 5 seconds: 5
Pick clothes in 10 seconds: 5
Pray for only a few people: 5
Work on school project, decide by self (picture) 7
Decide quickly what to take when leave house, 1 minute: 7
Bowl in wrong spot: 7

Contamination

Use cleaner (no warning), some on hands, eat 3
Don't go to the nurse 4
No sick questions before get on bus 4
No sick questions in the morning 4
Touch dead bee, eat 6
Touch rock salt removed three times, eat 6
Use bathroom sink where peer threw up 6
Touch inside of clean trash can, eat 6
Sit next to peer who throws up 6
Use cleaner, some on hands, eat 6-7
Touch rock salt to paper, paper to hands, eat 8
Touching owl pellets 8
Using toilet peer threw up in 9

Building Tolerance for Emotional and Physiological Discomfort

• Cognition play
• Acceptance play
• Ignore and go about your life
• Reframe discomfort
• Diaphragmatic Breathing
• Distraction if necessary (Hierarchy)

Working with Exposure Practices: Developmental Considerations

• Greater support/directive
• Emphasis on behavior
• More goal-setting & rewards
• Fun but not too distracting
• Positive pairing
• Age appropriate language

Breathing and PMR: helps one pause & stay
Important Exposure Components

- Voluntary
- Collaborative
- Managing, not avoiding anxiety
- Hierarchy-driven
- Promotes mastery of anxiety
- Build on accomplishments, don’t dwell on failures

Creative Exposures Ideas

- Contamination: play tic tac toe on desk with cookies than eat, basketball/contaminant
- Pervasive slowness/decision making: beat the clock, flip a coin
- Fear of harm to others: send therapist email about their pending harm or death
- Fear of harm to self: fun way to used feared items - sharp knife to cut and eat cake
- Fear related to magical thinking: milk drinking guessing contest
Supporting Parents: How to Encourage Exposure

- Join and nudge → scaffolding
- Build on success and interest
- Keep an eye on the larger picture
- Remember what fear feels like
- Make it a group effort

"Do one thing everyday that scares you." - Eleanor Roosevelt

Rewarding Efforts

Goals: Enhance motivation, address co-morbid problems

- Internal and external
  - Selecting a reward
  - Concrete and/or social
- What gets rewarded?
  - Effort, not results
  - Clearly defined behaviors
- How often?

Sample: Practice

![Shoes]

Sunday: Shoes
Monday: Dress
Tuesday: Dress
Wednesday: Dress
Thursday: Dress
Friday: Shoes
Saturday: Shoes
I started going outside even though it was windy. When I first tried, the goblin thought said, "A tornado is coming, don't go outside, check with your mom". But I said, "No way. I don't want to miss out on the fun outside" and I did the opposite. The goblin thought was hungry, but I didn't feed it. It was really hard at first but got easier as time passed. The goblin thought got so weak and it shrunk. Soon I didn't even notice the weather anymore and just had fun. I could go to the beach again!"
Plan For Lapses And Recovery

- Expect it and plan for it
- Put it in perspective
- Don’t quit—it’s the only way to fail
- Pick yourself up
- Celebrate your successes
- Plan for future slips

Look What I Did!

How Great am I?
You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face.
- Eleanor Roosevelt

Child/Adolescent OCD, Tic, Trich, & Anxiety Group (COTTAGE)

- Our staff has expertise in the treatment of anxiety and related disorders, including:
  - Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder
  - Social Anxiety Disorder
  - Tic Disorders
  - Generalized Anxiety Disorder
  - Panic Disorder/Agoraphobia
  - Separation Anxiety Disorder
  - Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
  - Specific Phobias

- We offer Clinical Services:
  - Comprehensive diagnostic evaluations
  - Empirically-supported treatments for youth
  - Research studies on childhood OCD, Tic Disorders, and Trichotillomania

- Additional Services:
  - Parent Workshops
  - School Consultations
  - Teacher Workshops
  - Clinician Training

Contact Us

Child & Adolescent OCD, Tic, Trich & Anxiety Group (COTTAGE)

- Visit us online at: www.med.upenn.edu/cottage

- To refer a patient or to schedule an appointment, please call: 215 ● 746 ● 1230

Thanks to the New Jersey Center for Tourette Syndrome and Associated Disorders (NJCTS) for providing the Wednesday Webinar Series
Resources

- Child and Adolescent OCD, Tic, Trich & Anxiety Group, Philadelphia, PA 19104, Phone: 215-746-1230
- Child and Adolescent Anxiety Disorders Clinic, Temple University (Dr. Philip Kendall), 215-204-7165
- The Anxiety & OCD Treatment Center of Philadelphia, 215-735-7588

Family-Based Treatment of Early Childhood Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder
The Pediatric Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder Treatment Study for Young Children (POTS Jr)
A Randomized Clinical Trial. Jennifer Freeman, PhD, et al.
JAMA Psychiatry, April 2014

Camp Cope-A-Lot: The Coping Cat CD RomA
12-session computer-assisted CBT for child anxiety

www.workbookpublishing.com
Books on Anxiety for Parents & Teachers

- T. Chansky. *Freeing Your Child From Anxiety, Freeing your Child from Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Freeing your Child from Negativity*

Books for Children

- Danneberg. *First Day Jitters.*
- Cain & Smith-Moore. *I Don’t Know Why…I Guess I’m Shy: A Story About Taming Imaginary Fears.*
- Marcus, Marcus, & Jesche. *Into the Great Forest: A Story for Children Away from Parents for the First Time.*
Books for Children

- Wagner (OCD). *Up and Down the Worry Hill.*

Video Clips

Beasts Of The Southern Wild: 
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EEu8zOXcQ5I

Harry Potter: 
http://www.pinterest.com/pin/424393964858312499/

Rise Of The Guardians: 
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J-rBH4qSF0w

Anxiety BC Youth: (Interactive learning) 
http://youth.anxietybc.com/

Internet Resources

- Anxiety Disorders Association of America: www.adaa.org
- Obsessive Compulsive Foundation: www.ocf.org
- Trichotillomania Learning Center: www.trich.org
- National Tourette’s Syndrome Association: www.tsa-usa.org
- Children’s Center for Anxiety: www.worrywisekids.org

Find a Therapist: 
- www.abct.org/FindATherapist
- www.childanxietySIG.com/referrainetwork
- www.OCFoundation.org/findhelp