

How A Spouse Can Play A Pivotal Role In Their Partners OCD Recovery.

You can be highly influential and effective in helping your spouse gain control over OCD.

Being the spouse of an individual who is struggling with OCD can be extremely difficult. Perhaps you've had to take on what feels like more than your fair share responsibilities for the household. Maybe you now have to do all or twice as much cleaning and laundry due to your spouse's contamination fears. Or perhaps your spouse's fears of leaving doors unlocked keeps you from going to bed earlier because you need to check each door with him or her before you can go to bed. Or maybe your spouse's rituals keeps them from having time to write checks, pay bills, or balance bank statements and now those responsibilities have fallen squarely on your shoulders. Your family relationships and social activities may have fallen by the waist side because rituals your spouse has to complete before leaving the house make it difficult to attend or be on time.

You feel guilty if you go to parties or engage in other activities by yourself. You find yourself feeling lonely and isolated from friends and family relationships followed by feeling frustrated, angry, or even betrayed. This reaction to your spouse's OCD is actually quite normal.

Remember that no one wants to live a life ruled by OCD. You can be highly influential and effective in helping your spouse gain control over this oftentimes heartbreaking disorder.

Who is to blame?

OCD is neither the fault of the person who develops it nor the fault of a spouse. It's no one's fault. OCD is an anxiety disorder and like all anxiety disorders it is neurobiological in nature. So it does no good to blame each other for the presence of OCD. In fact, blaming can be counterproductive, if not harmful.

What's most important is that you avoid dwelling on negative thoughts and concentrate on finding a therapist who can work with you and your spouse.

How can I help?

Your spouse's recovery from OCD can begin with you so start by learning about OCD.

To help you spouse you will need to understand what your spouse goes through with this frequently debilitating disorder.

Find a Therapist that can work with you and your spouse

Find an appropriate therapist for treatment of OCD and then encourage him or her to actively participate with you in the therapy process. An extensive body of research supports Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT), which is comprised of Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP) and Cognitive Therapy, as the most effective behavioral treatment for OCD. Medication is sometimes prescribed in conjunction with CBT.

You may also want to consider attending a local OCD support group that is open to spouses and family members. Talking with others who have had similar experiences and learning about how they have approached family difficulties can be extremely helpful, if not therapeutic.

Why do WE need a therapist if my spouse has OCD?

That is a great question! When one member of the couple has OCD they both have to deal with the symptoms. The spouse affected with OCD has to take ownership of his or her problem and their partner has to stop his or her participation.

Research has indicated that trying to adjust to a loved one's OCD can result in mild and sometimes severe distress for partner. Yet spouses seldom seek the help they need to cope and instead usually focus on the individual with OCD. Living with or caring for a spouse with OCD can be extremely stressful and it's critical for both you and your spouse that you take care of your own physical and psychological needs. When you're less overwhelmed by frustration, guilt, and other negative emotions, you are in a better state of mind and will actually be more effective in helping your spouse.

Stop accommodating and learn to detach from your partner's OCD.

Stop enabling your spouse's OCD because your help will not actually make OCD stop. In fact, participating in OCD rituals actually allows the compulsions to persist and even become stronger. Protecting your husband or wife from the negative consequences of obsessions and compulsions can also decrease his or her motivation to obtain treatment. A spouse, who starts to be late for work because you no longer help him or her with checking rituals before leaving home, for example, may be motivated to seek treatment.

Remember, you can be supportive of the person you love who is suffering, but stop supporting the disorder. It's important to talk with your loved one and remind him or her that you're participating in the rituals may make him or her feel better temporarily, but that it doesn't help decrease the symptoms in the long term.

Start to communicate about the OCD

Don't be afraid to start to openly communicate with your spouse about their OCD and the effects it has on your relationship. Feeling frustrated, angry, or even betrayed, as mentioned earlier, is a common reaction to your spouse's OCD. These negative emotions will sometimes lead to arguments and yelling in an attempt to get your partner to stop his or her rituals. While this release of anger and frustration temporarily makes you feel better it, in most cases, leads to increased anxiety for your spouse and usually increases OCD symptoms.

Try to establish a positive emotional climate in the home. The importance of how you communicate with your loved one as well as the level of support you provide cannot be overemphasized. A therapist can help you manage emotions and attitudes as you interact with your spouse.

Discuss with your spouse the ways you've been accommodating the OCD and how important it is to work together as you start to decrease your participation in rituals. Try to help your loved one understand that you're doing this because you care about and want to support him or her. You're not doing this to be mean or spiteful; you want him or her to overcome OCD.

This sounds easier said than done but as you develop these key skill you can become and agent of change. With proper treatment, it is possible to navigate the emotional maze you're experiencing and rebuild a solid relationship with your spouse.