

# ANXIETY IN THE CLASSROOM

## What Are Anxiety & OCD ?

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# ANXIETY & OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER

Children with anxiety or **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)** are likely to exhibit symptoms in the school setting. For this reason, it's important to understand the signs and symptoms of Anxiety and OCD and to be able to differentiate between normal vs. abnormal behavior.



# ANXIETY

## Anxiety in children.

- Everyone experiences anxiety at some point in their lives, from the very young to the very old. In school, students may get nervous during a fire drill, before a test or presentation, or when saying goodbye to their families in the morning.
- It is normal and common for students to get anxious in situations like these. When a student's anxiety starts to creep out of specific situations and into their everyday life, they might have an anxiety disorder.



# ANXIETY

## Anxiety in children.

*Anxiety*, is defined as chronic and/or generalized worry, fear, or nervousness that students express a lot of the time.

- The anxiety the student feels is NOT driven by specific situations – they feel anxious most of the time, regardless of what is happening in their life.
- In these cases, anxiety noticeably impacts a student's behavior in school and at home, their ability to participate in class, their learning, and/or their ability to perform assigned tasks.



# ANXIETY

## Anxiety in children.

- For BIPOC youth, experiences of racism and discrimination, social determinants of health, current and historical stressors, and the resulting internalized stress may contribute to increased anxiety and mental health concerns.
- Further, youth living within a racially oppressive context may feel as if they are constantly in a state of hypervigilance, contributing to increased anxious arousal or generalized worry, fear, or nervousness.



# Types of anxiety experienced by school age children.



While each of these conditions have different symptoms, the common thread between them is that they cause severe, chronic disruption in a child's life.

**1** Generalized Anxiety Disorder

**2** Social Anxiety Disorder

**3** Selective Mutism

**4** Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

**5** Panic Disorder/  
Panic Attacks

**6** Separation Anxiety Disorder

**7** Specific Phobias

# OCD



## OCD in children.

- While OCD is one of the more common mental health disorders among school-age youth, it is not widely understood and is rarely included in discussions of mental health in the classroom.
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder involves both obsessions and compulsions that take a lot of time, get in the way of important activities — such as school and extracurricular activities, developing friendships, and self-care — and can cause severe anxiety in those affected.



# OBSESSIONS



Obsessions are intrusive and unwanted thoughts, images, or urges that occur over and over again and feel outside of the child's control. These obsessions are unpleasant for the child and typically cause worry, anxiety, and distress.

# COMPULSIONS



Compulsions (also known as rituals) are behaviors the child feels they "must do" in order to get rid of the upsetting feelings caused by the obsessions. A child may also believe that engaging in these compulsions will somehow prevent bad things from happening.

# OCD

**In general, OCD is diagnosed when obsessions and compulsions become so time-consuming that they negatively interfere with the child's daily life.**

Typically, the obsessions and compulsions become gradually more severe over time until they get to this point.



# OCD

## OCD in kids.

- Among racial and ethnic minorities, OCD symptoms may be influenced by negative stereotypes, racism, or one's racial identity. For example, fear of validating false racial stereotypes may contribute to OCD-related anxieties.
- For more information about how experiences of racism may influence and/or exacerbate symptoms of OCD for racial and ethnic minorities, please view this video by Monica Williams, PhD, ABPP, Jenny Yip, PsyD, ABPP, and Valerie Andrews.



# IS IT ANXIETY/ OCD OR IS IT TYPICAL BEHAVIOR?

**It is common for students to have anxiety/fears, and to have certain routines/rituals for certain times.**

What makes anxiety and OCD different from these common fears and behaviors is the frequency and intensity at which they occur, and whether or not they get in the way of the student's daily life.

# IS IT ANXIETY / OCD OR IS IT TYPICAL BEHAVIOUR?



## TYPICAL FEARS / ROUTINES

The content is usually commonplace (e.g. fear of thunderstorms, wanting to eat the same breakfast every day, etc.)

Age-appropriate (e.g. wanting to be tucked in at night).

Do not consume an inordinate amount of time nor interfere with daily functioning.

## ANXIETY / OCD

May seem bizarre or unusual, out of sync with what is happening. May be extreme or disproportionate responses to the situation.

The student may have fears that are not typical to their age group (e.g. sexual/violent intrusive thoughts).

Experience of fears and/or performance of rituals is excessive, time consuming, and has a negative impact on the student's functioning.

# IS IT ANXIETY / OCD OR IS IT TYPICAL BEHAVIOUR?



## TYPICAL FEARS / ROUTINES

Associated with enjoyment or satisfaction; the student wants to do them, or likes doing them.

Responsive to logic or reason.

Are able to be stopped or interrupted at will or when asked.

## ANXIETY / OCD

Students find their behaviors distressing and/or overwhelming.

Reason or common sense do not stop or help the student's fears or behaviors.

Student feels they cannot control fears or stop doing their behaviors and interrupting just causes distress.

# ANXIETY & OCD IN CHILDREN

- Anxiety disorders and OCD are not something a student can simply “snap out of.” Students with anxiety that is disproportionate to the situation find it difficult to manage their feelings.
- Students with OCD typically have little control over obsessions they suffer from and compulsions they perform to get rid of their bad feelings.



# WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY AND OCD THAT A CHILD MAY EXHIBIT IN SCHOOL?

In this video, Eric Storch, PhD, talks about the different ways that children may exhibit signs and symptoms of anxiety and/or OCD in the school setting.



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# SIGNS / SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY IN SCHOOL



- Anxiety may make a student appear to be cautious, nervous, shy, or fearful.
- Anxious students may express their fears by crying or throwing tantrums, and it may be very difficult for them to calm down.
- Some students may seek constant approval or reassurance from others.
- Students may describe feeling physical symptoms, like headaches, stomachaches, racing heartbeat, or difficulty breathing.
- You may notice that they are sweating, or that they are trembling/shaking. In some cases, students may experience full-blown panic episodes or panic attacks.

# SIGNS / SYMPTOMS OF OCD IN SCHOOL

- Repeated checking, ordering, or arranging items on desks, backpacks, lockers. Etc.
- Wanting to complete assignments “perfectly,” checking, and re-doing it
- Erasing repeatedly until the paper has holes in it or the writing is illegible
- Repeating letters, syllables, words, or sentences, until they sound right
- Walking in specific patterns through doorways, counting tiles or syllables, touching or tapping in symmetry, repeated sitting and standing

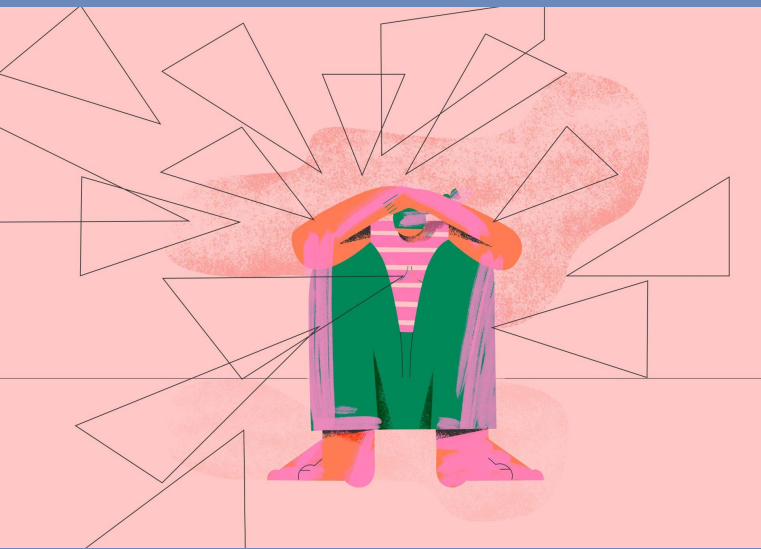


# SIGNS / SYMPTOMS OF OCD IN SCHOOL



- Refusing to touch others' books, pencils, gym balls etc. or getting upset if personal items are touched by others.
- Opening doors, books etc. with elbows or with a tissue, avoiding physical contact, refusal share pencils, or supplies.
- Repeated checking, ordering, or arranging items on desks, backpacks, lockers. etc.
- Asking the same questions repeatedly even though the child knows the answer.
- Excessive reassurance seeking, e.g. asking "Are you sure I'm going to be okay?"

# OCD OBSESSIONS



Common obsessions that fuel these compulsions may include:

- Worrying about germs, getting sick, or dying.
- Extreme fears about bad things happening or doing something wrong.
- Feeling that things have to be “just right.”
- Disturbing and unwanted thoughts or images about hurting others.
- Disturbing and unwanted thoughts or images of a sexual nature.

# OCD OBSESSIONS

## PLEASE NOTE

*Students who have sexual and/or violent intrusive thoughts find them to be very upsetting and distressing. The experience of these thoughts does NOT mean these students have any desire or intention to act on them.*

*It can be scary for school personnel to hear about these thoughts, but it is very important to note that these students are not at risk and should not be confused with students who may have a history of or intent to perform antisocial, aggressive, or otherwise violent behavior.*

# WHAT IS RACIAL TRAUMA?

While all students are susceptible to anxiety or OCD symptoms in the school setting, students from racial minority groups are also vulnerable to symptoms of racial trauma. **Therefore, it's essential to understand the signs and symptoms of racial trauma to differentiate between normal vs. abnormal behavior, particularly when considering anxiety or OCD among students of color.**



## Racial Trauma in BIPOC Children

- Traumatic events that occur due to experiencing racism or discrimination can profoundly impact mental and physical well-being. Racial trauma, or race-based traumatic stress, refers to the mental and emotional impact of one's experiences of racism and discrimination. Signs of racial trauma appear in students ranging from infancy-adulthood.

# RACIAL TRAUMA IN A SCHOOL SETTING.

When it comes to racial trauma in a school setting, you may notice some of the following signs/symptoms:

- Racial trauma may contribute to students reporting increased physical symptoms, like headaches, stomach aches, tension in the chest, or a racing heartbeat.
- Students may report increased negative emotions, such as depression or anxiety, within the context of discrimination.
- Exposure to chronically stressful race-related conditions may make some students feel detachment or numbness.
- Racial trauma may elicit feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and worry for students about their skin tone and ethnic-racial identity.

# RACIAL TRAUMA IN A SCHOOL SETTING.

When it comes to racial trauma in a school setting, you may notice some of the following signs/symptoms:

- Some students may become preoccupied with their safety or the safety of peers/family members.
- Students may experience decreased academic motivation or have difficulty concentrating in the classroom.
- Incomplete assignments or homework, although the child is capable of doing them.
- Some students may seek reassurance or validation from others.

# WHAT NOW?

- If you're a school personnel and you've read all of this, you're probably asking yourself, "OK, *what now?*" Here's the simplest answer to that question: **Being informed about anxiety and OCD, and how culture and diversity may affect anxiety and OCD symptomatology, is important for school personnel because it helps better serve the students in your classrooms.**
- This information allows you to be aware of how anxiety and OCD can affect your students. It also allows you to be prepared when your students are experiencing symptoms. ***This is not asking you to step out of your role, but to simply be in the know regarding anxiety and OCD in the classroom.***

# THANK YOU.

## QUESTIONS ?

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