



Rifka Schonfeld STRATEGIES

THE NEWSLETTER FOR OPTIMUM SUCCESS

TIPS ON SOCIAL SKILLS FOR ADULTS & CHILDREN

HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE OCD?

Dear Readers,

This week's newsletter includes a question on the topic of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.

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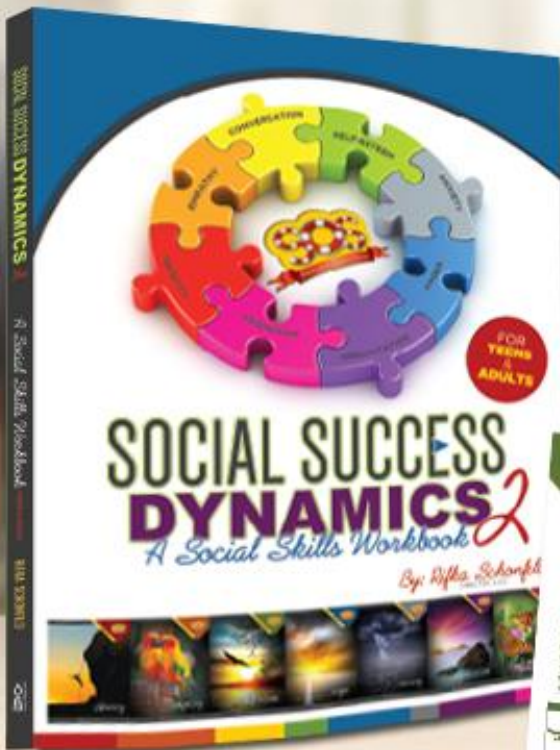
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Rifka Schonfeld
STRATEGIES

QUESTION:

How do I know if I have OCD?

We all get nervous before big events and milestones, how can I distinguish?



NEW!
**A NEW SOCIAL SKILL WORKBOOK
 FOR ADULTS & TEENS**
by Rifka Schonfeld



Rifka Schonfeld
STRATEGIES **ANSWER:**

Everyone of us knows what it feels like to be anxious or apprehensive: the night before a big test, going on a *shidduch*, or when preparing for *Yom Kippur*. So, how do you distinguish that normal anxiety from Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)?

The World Health Organization estimates that around 2.5% of the world's population is affected by OCD, an anxiety disorder, which ranges from children to senior citizens. Evidence is strong that OCD tends to run in families. Of course, having a genetic tendency for OCD does not mean people will develop OCD, but it means there is a stronger chance they might.

Dr. Elana Pearl Ben-Joseph of the Emours Center for Children's Health Media states that people "with OCD become preoccupied with whether something could be harmful, dangerous, wrong, or dirty — or with thoughts about bad stuff that might happen. With OCD, upsetting or scary thoughts or images, called obsessions, pop into a person's mind and are hard to shake."

Whereas with regular anxious thoughts, a person can be distracted or suppress the worrisome thoughts, with OCD, the rise in anxiety is so strong that the person feels that he or she must perform the task or dwell on the thought over and over again, to the point where it interferes with everyday life. Patrick McGrath, Ph.D., author of *The OCD Answer Book*, adds, "OCD is a mental disorder that affects the deepest parts of a person's brain. It is not something to be wished away or punished into submission."

Here are different areas where obsessive-compulsive thoughts and behaviors may be concentrated:

- **Washing and cleaning:** People who consistently wash and clean may have a fear of getting contaminated or spreading contamination. To offset this, someone with OCD might engage in excessive showering and washing in order to kill germs. Often, this can lead to extremely dry skin that cracks and bleeds.

- **Hoarding:** People may resist throwing out objects because they believe the item might have a use in the future. At times, this can mean saving meaningless scraps of paper or souvenir baseball caps from years ago.
- **Checking:** Before going to sleep, people with OCD will frequently check and recheck the locks on doors and window. Prior to leaving the house, they will ensure that the stove is off, sometimes returning to confirm several times.

Diagnosis

If someone you know shows signs of OCD, talk to a healthcare professional. In screening for OCD, most doctors use a tool called a structured clinical interview to determine if the person has symptoms consistent with OCD. Structured clinical interviews contain standardized questions to ensure that each patient is interviewed in the same way.

Treatment

Once diagnosed, the most successful treatment helps people change their thoughts and feelings by first changing behavior. Often, it involves exposing people to their fears in order for them to recognize that no disastrous outcomes will occur, thus eventually decreasing their anxiety. Overtime, the affected person gains confidence that he or she can fight OCD. They learn that giving into Obsessive Compulsive Disorder does not make the worries go away. An important note, though, is that this method of treatment should be provided by a professional and not simply attempted at home.

The good news is that with increased awareness, OCD is treatable and surmountable. The first step is recognizing the fear – then you can learn how to fight it.

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TUESDAY & WEDNESDAY
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