

There are many symptoms of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) and autism that are similar. It can be hard to know if symptoms are due to one diagnosis or the other, or if a person has both. This resource will review some of the differences between these diagnoses.

What is OCD?

Obsessions are thoughts that are hard to ignore or make go away. These thoughts are usually fears like:

- Getting sick and dying from germs.
- That you have hurt someone.
- A need to do things or feel “just right.”

There are different types of obsessions that people with OCD can have. In order to get rid of these “obsessions,” people do certain behaviors over and over. These are called “compulsions.” Common compulsions include:

- Excessive washing or cleaning.
- Checking things over and over.
- Repeating actions or phrases until it feels “just right.”



Symptoms of Autism Similar to OCD

Obsessions and Perseverations

Many people with autism have unique interests and it may seem like they are “obsessed” with those topics. Unlike obsessive thoughts in OCD, these interests aren’t upsetting to the person or make them anxious. Often these interests are considered hobbies. Obsessions in OCD are not things people like a lot, they are intrusive, reoccurring thoughts that are scary, upsetting and cause anxiety.

Repetitive Behavior

For people with autism, repetitive behaviors are often a way to help manage overwhelming situations. Their behaviors may help them calm down, relax or feel good. For people with OCD, the repetitive behaviors to decrease anxiety based on their obsessive thoughts. These behaviors often make the person feel bad, and only decrease their anxiety for a little bit.



OCD in ASD

Some people with autism are also diagnosed with OCD. This means they show obsessive and compulsive behaviors that cause problems and impairs their everyday life. They also have to be more or in addition to the person's typical symptoms of autism. If you think a person with autism may also have OCD, it should be discussed with the individual's doctor.