

# OCD AND CORONAVIRUS...

**Living with Obsessive Compulsive traits can be challenging at the best of times. Currently as we all navigate through this COVID landscape I think we can all agree that right now is not the best of times.**

For those who suffer from OCD/OCD traits you will recognise the challenges; for those less familiar below is a brief description by the USA National Institute of Mental Health:

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is a common, chronic and long-lasting disorder in which a person has uncontrollable, reoccurring thoughts (obsessions) and behaviors (compulsions) that he or she feels the urge to repeat over and over'.

Our own NHS website describes an obsession as an 'unwanted and unpleasant thought, image or urge that repeatedly enters your mind, causing feelings of anxiety, disgust or unease.' A compulsion as 'a repetitive behaviour or mental act that you feel you need to do to temporarily relieve the anxiety or distress brought on by the obsessional thought'.

## **A clear and present danger versus "Am I being cautious or compulsive?"**

It's clear from the descriptions given for OCD that most of us are now acting in an obsessional way as its now considered essential to protect our own health and the health of others. Whilst COVID-19 encouraged behaviours might look like OCD, there are key differences between protective behaviours in the face of a pandemic and a clinical diagnosis of OCD.

In OCD the repetitive, thoughts and behaviours are very time consuming, can

take over one's life and are seen by the sufferer as unhelpful and unacceptable "not in line with who I am or what I believe".

## **Take 5 To Survive Coronavirus Anxiety**

Sane.org/information have some useful coping tips which we might be helpful to all of us with or without OCD: thank you Bronnwyn Millar for her helpful blog:

### **1. Bring things back to basics**

Keep yourself fed, hydrated and rested. Whilst this might seem obvious for the OCD sufferer and the newly 'forced to be obsessive due to COVID' basics can fall to the wayside when we are in crisis. Reminders on the fridge or via an app can be helpful especially to keep us hydrated (NHS guidelines advise 6-8 glasses a day /1.2 litres). Most of us should aim for three meals and two snacks a day trying not to leave more than four hours gap between eating. These tips can balance our metabolism, blood sugars, bowel habits, sleep, anxiety and concentration.

### **2. Activity**

If you have OCD, especially if you have a tendency to self-isolate and are being encouraged to stay at home due to COVID, it can be tempting to deal with anxiety by not going out. This behaviour can detrimental to your mental health in the present and in the future.

Remember as long as you follow the appropriate guidelines its ok to go out for a local walk, isolation is so unhelpful to everyone's mental health, getting a breath of fresh air doesn't mean having to go too far.

### **3. Staying connected is as in important as staying informed**

Keeping up to date with news and media coverage of the pandemic, can easily

become a repetitive, encouraged activity that is done to allay anxiety but also is anxiety provoking. For those with OCD this can easily mutate to a compulsion.

### **4. Don't let OCD set the rules**

The key here is follow the current guidelines no more, no less OCD might want more but this is unhelpful and unhealthy, balance is critical.

### **5. Accept anyone of us could get sick**

For all of us no matter what precautions we may or may not take life is uncertain. OCD does not like uncertainty, so maybe acceptance of the risk could be strangely reassuring?

Learning that accepting uncertainty, as uncomfortable as it is may be a strong defense against obsessing with COVID-19 there is only so much one can do.

**If you are a retired officer or family member and would like to speak to someone regarding your mental health please contact the Psychological Therapies Team at the number below. We are a specialist free of charge service to members of the retired police family who have been negatively impacted, directly or indirectly by their service.**

**Maureen McMillajn  
Cognitive Behavioural Psychotherapist**

**Bronwyn millar2020/www.sane.org  
NHS  
USA NIMH  
Getselfhelp.co.uk/stopp.htm**

PRRT is based at Maryfield, Holywood and provides psychological therapies, physiotherapy, personal development and training to the retired police population. PSNI employees can access our healthcare services via referrals from PSNI occupational health. Serving officers can access personal development and training directly. For further information or to make an appointment please call 028 9042 7788.



**For further information on all PRRT services please visit [www.prrt.org](http://www.prrt.org).**