

# Supporting Students with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)



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# Aims

- To understand more about OCD
- To become familiar with the signs and symptoms of OCD in school
- Support strategies
- Tips for helping in the classroom



# What is OCD?

*“OCD is a bit like a phobia of thoughts...”*

- Anxiety disorder
- Range from mild to severe



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= LGHSuB\\_-bk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LGHSuB_-bk)

# What is OCD?

## Obsessions

Thoughts, images and/or impulses that are:

- Intrusive
- Unpleasant
- Recurrent
- Cause marked anxiety and/or distress



## Compulsions

Physical or mental acts to ignore, suppress or neutralise the obsession/distress (can include avoidance)

- Repetitive or irrational behaviours
- Short term relief

# Common obsessions

Needing to  
tell, ask or  
confess

Transformation  
or loss

Symmetry

Doing something  
forbidden or  
embarrassing

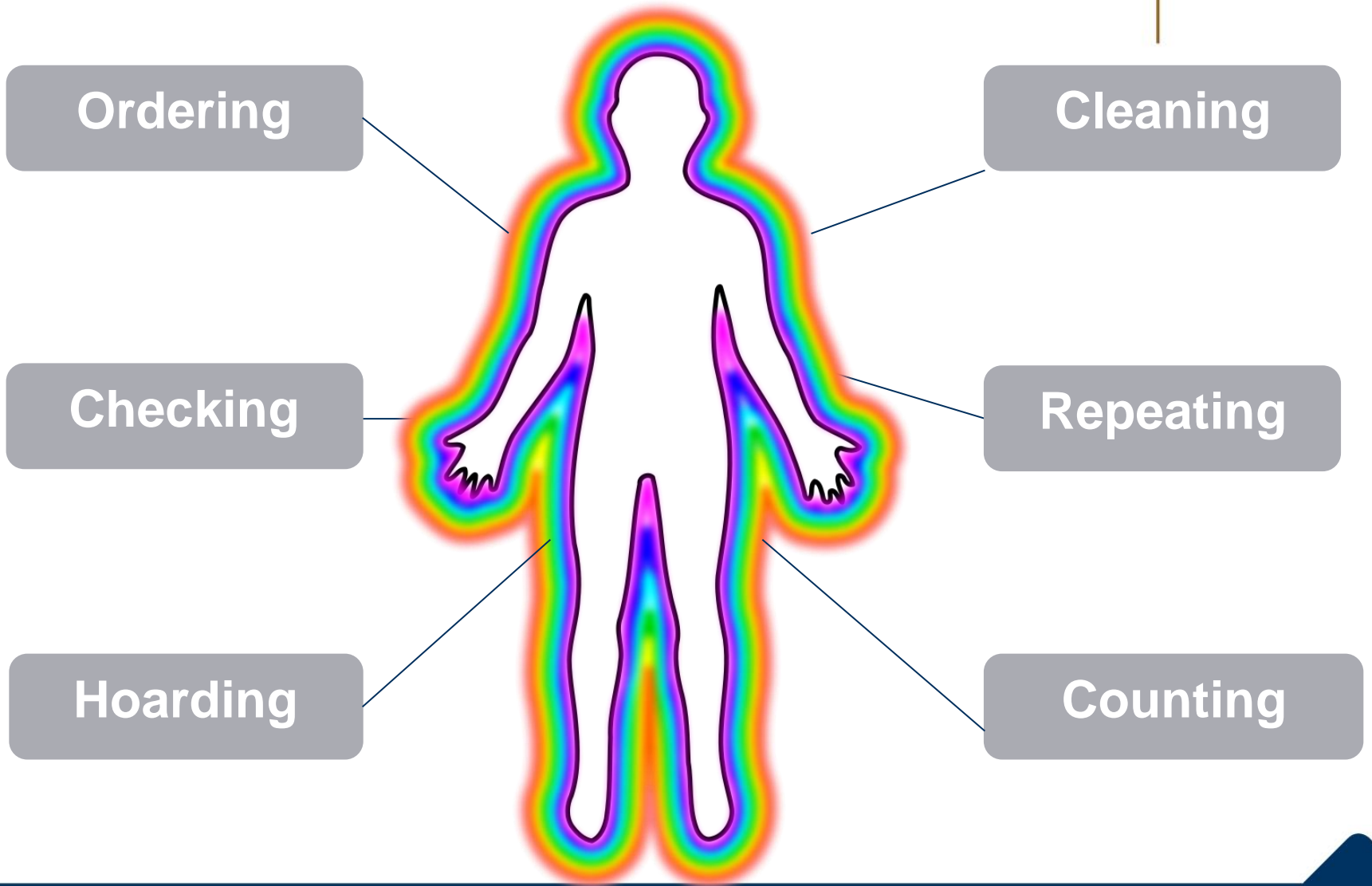


Dirt or  
contamination

Harm to self or  
others

Unwanted  
sexual  
thoughts

# Common compulsions



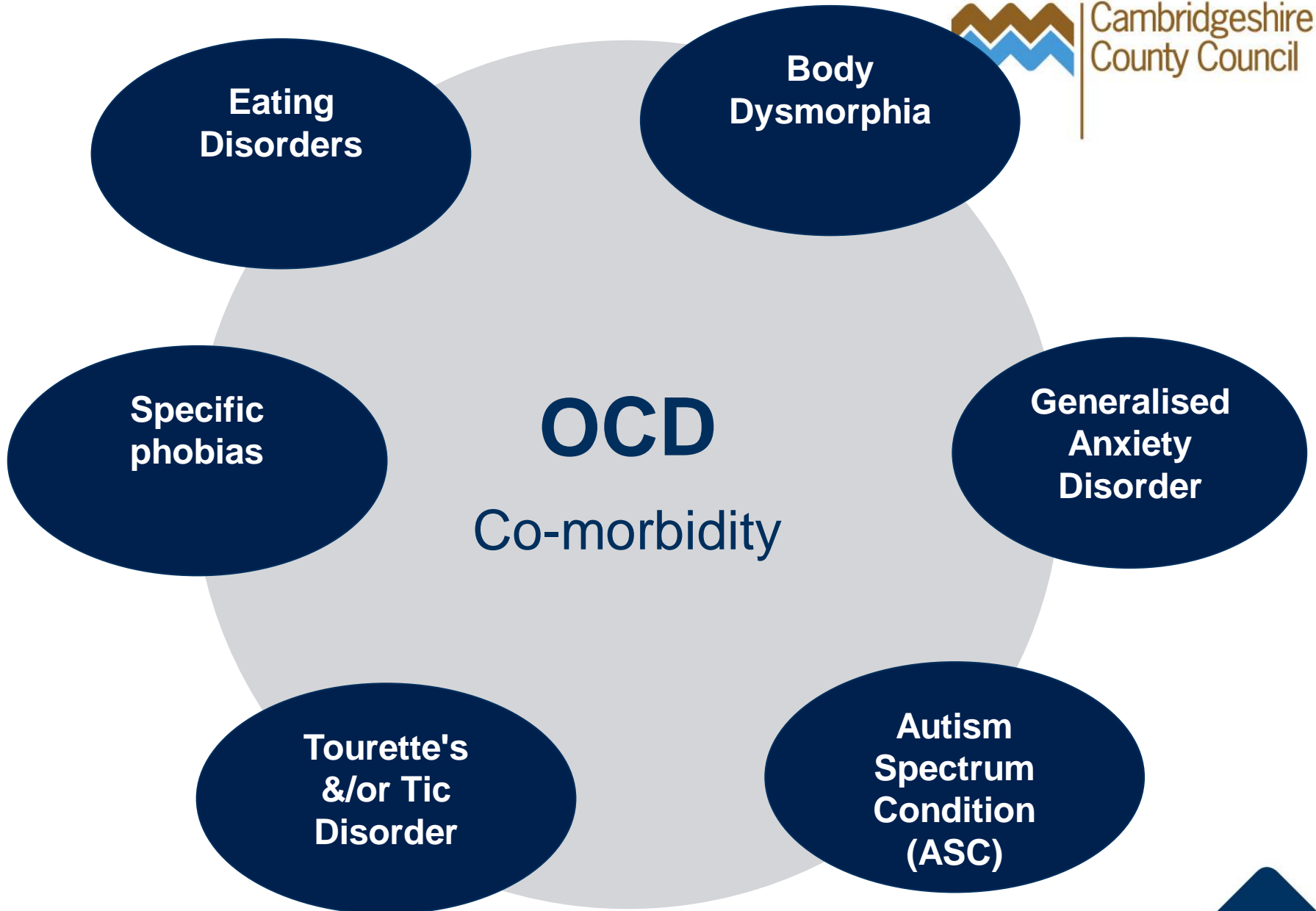
# Facts about OCD

(Wood & Kindynis, 2020)

- Around 130,000 young people at school in the UK with OCD
- Affects 1-3% of the population
- Male : Female ratio is 1:1
- Equally common across all cultures
- Commonly begins around puberty but can occur from 3 years
- High comorbidity with anxiety and depression

*“Many try to hide their upsetting symptoms, frightened about what would happen if they opened up to their friends or a teacher” BUT “it is important to remember that parents may not always be the first to recognise that their child has a problem...”*

## OCD Action

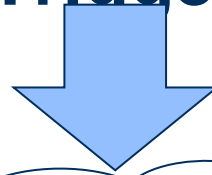




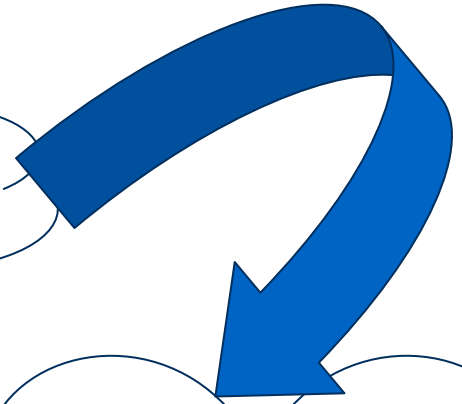
**Situation/  
Trigger**



Cambridgeshire  
County Council



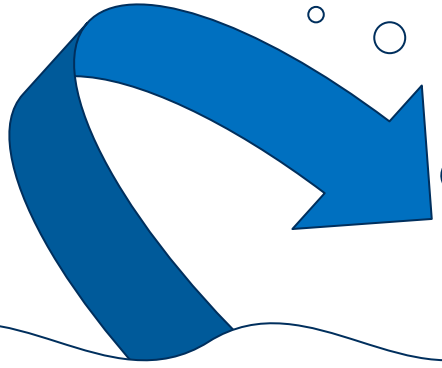
**OBSESSION**



**FEELING**



**COMPULSION**



**TEMPORARY  
RELIEF**



# Situation/ Trigger

In a science lesson  
doing an experiment

## OBSESSION

*Lots of people have touched this,  
this is 'germy'  
I am going to get contaminated  
I am going to die  
I will spread to my parents, they will  
die and it will be all my fault.*

**TEMPORARY  
RELIEF**

**FEELING**

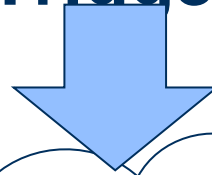
**Fear**

## COMPULSION

*Avoid touching things  
Constantly washing hands  
or using hand gel  
Excessive showering*

# Situation/ Trigger

In a science lesson  
doing an experiment



## OBSESSION

*Lots of people have touched this,  
this is 'germy'  
I am going to get contaminated  
I am going to die  
I will spread to my parents, they will  
die and it will be all my fault.*

Receives a sanction  
Finds lesson too  
distressing to access

## TEMPORARY RELIEF

Refuses to take part in  
lesson  
Avoids/withdrawal lesson or  
activity  
Disruptive behaviour

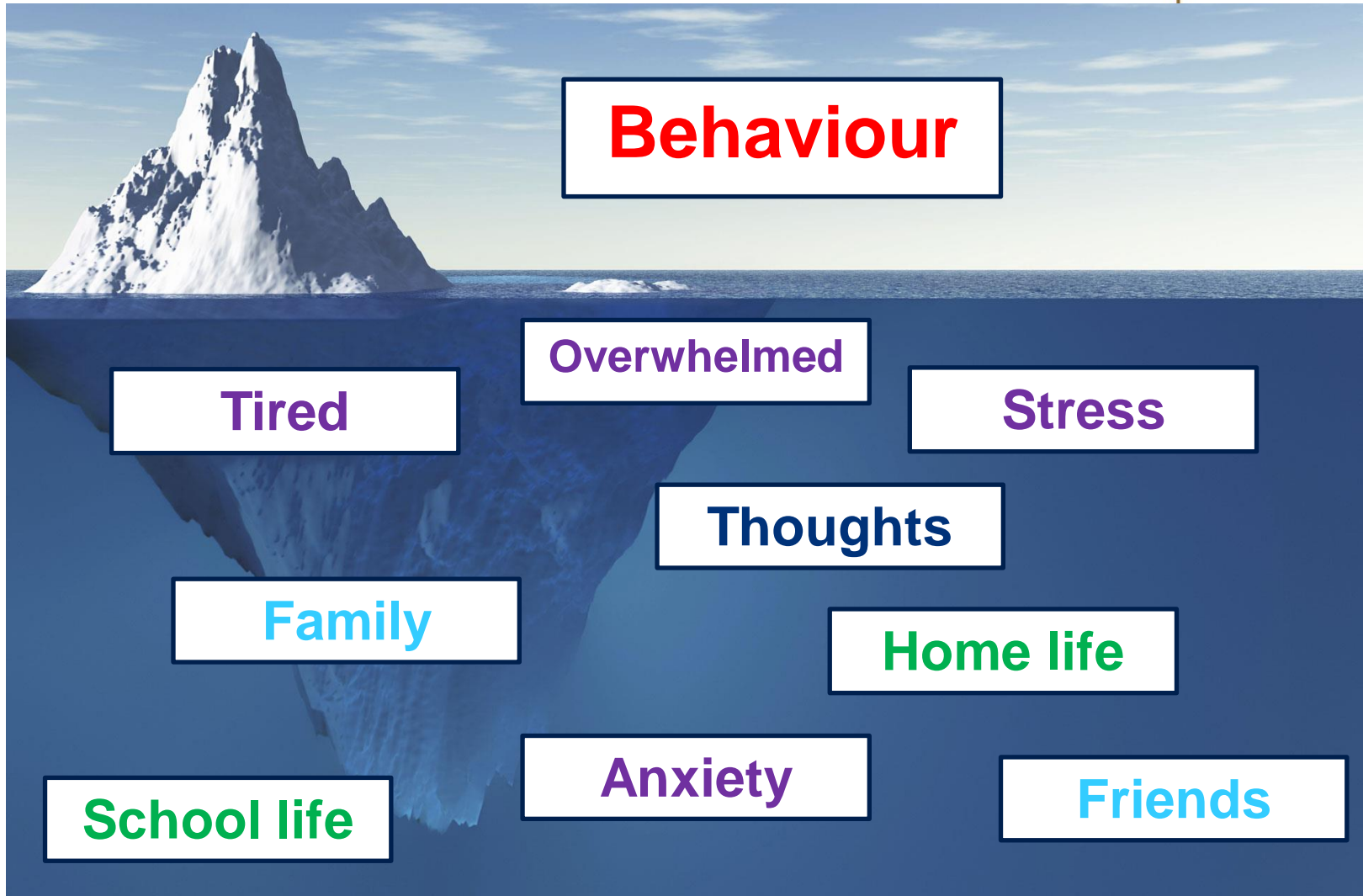
## COMPULSION

*Avoid touching things  
Constantly washing hands  
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Excessive showering*

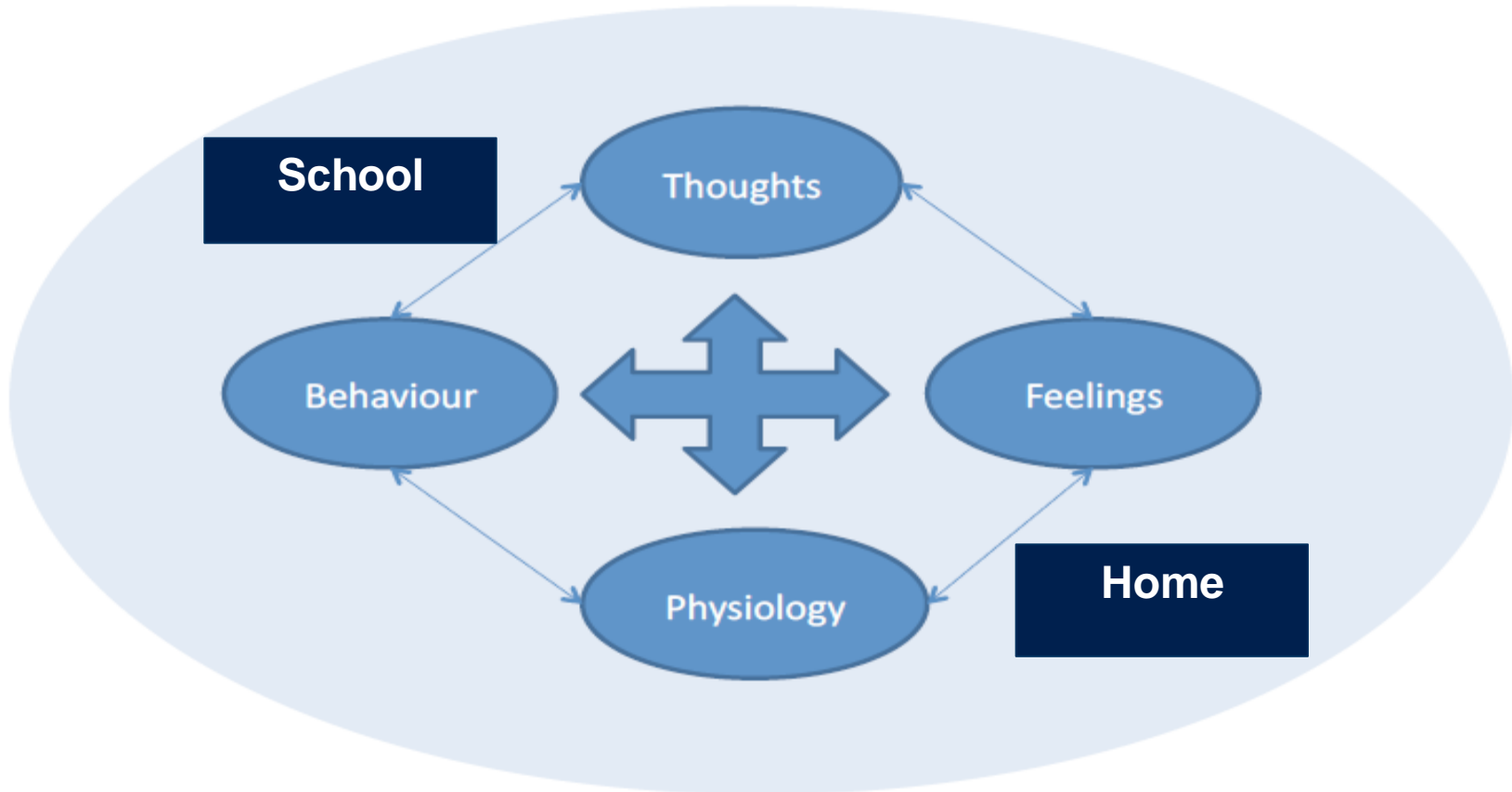
## FEELING

**Fear**





# Interacting systems



# Intervention

Guidelines from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) and The Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health (ACAMH) suggest Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) (with exposure and response prevention) is the recommended first-line treatment for obsessive compulsive disorder in young people, and has been shown to be highly effective (NICE, 2005).

Where therapy alone is not beneficial, a combination of CBT and medication may be considered.

## **Successful treatment involves:**

- ✓ Early identification (help sought as soon as possible)
- ✓ Parental involvement
- ✓ School support



# Signs in schools

- Poor attention and concentration
- Extreme tiredness
- Frequent prolonged toilet visits
- An inability to touch objects, materials or other people
- Excessive questioning and need for reassurance
- Messy work
- Repeated lateness
- Late handing in work
- Arranging items on desk or classroom so that objects are aligned
- Difficulties making decisions
- Low self esteem and difficulty with peer relationships
- Reduction in grades or decline in school performance

**Taken from OCD Action**

# Signs in schools: potential behavioural misconceptions

- Distraction
- Slowness/delay in responding
- Avoidance
- Tapping and/or touching symmetrically
- Complaints of fatigue
- Student's work over time



*All behaviour is a form of communication so it is important to consider any patterns or trends*



# School response

- ◆ Refer to **school guidelines and procedures** regarding **any** Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) and/or behavioural concerns
- ◆ Communication with **young person**, their **family** and any **professionals**
- ◆ Find out intervention/treatment in place to ensure **consistency in strategies and support** (particularly in terms of responding to student behaviour)
- ◆ Consider **current pressures** and **stressors** the young person is experiencing and their potential impact on performance in school
- ◆ An adaptable approach – **maintaining both high *and* flexible behavioural expectations**

# General Strategies

## Communication

- Develop systems with young person for them to subtly indicate when they are struggling
- Options for lesson breaks
- Develop system with family (e.g. communication book)

## Planning & preparation

- Understanding needs and function of behaviour
- Advanced notice for changes in routine or schedule

## Peer support

- Awareness training or 'buddy' support

# Classroom tips

**Consider seating arrangements**

**Focus on strengths**

**Be mindful of certain topics**

**Give extra time/extensions**

**Peer support**

**Access arrangements**

**Reduce workloads and structure homework**

**Set time limits**

**Access to smaller/quiet learning environments**

**Access to technology**

# Managing OCD

<p><b>Support the young person to recognise the OCD is separate to them</b></p>	<p><b>OCD is a lot like a bully</b> <b>Some helpful responses include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ <i>“Is this you or your XXX (OCD) talking?”</i></li><li>▪ <i>“This sounds like your OCD...”</i></li></ul>
<p><b>Educate the young person to recognise anxiety and the way it impacts their body and behaviour</b></p>	<p><b>Anxiety is a normal feeling that everyone has. When we feel anxious we usually have changes in our body &amp; behaviour.</b></p> <p><b>There are plenty of resources available that can support children and young people to understand anxiety.</b></p>
<p><b>Plan with the young person the situations they may find most anxiety provoking</b></p>	<p><b>Different kinds of situations can trigger anxiety. Anxiety mapping (adults) and rating scales (CYP) can help us to understand this.</b></p>
<p><b>Try avoid accommodating the young person’s OCD</b></p>	<p><b>This can be in terms of reassurance or doing things for their OCD (e.g. engaging in rituals, avoiding etc.)</b></p>
<p><a href="http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk">www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk</a></p>	

# Managing OCD

**Encourage the young person to recognise the negative thoughts that are associated with their OCD and anxiety (and normalise them)**

- **Thoughts are our mind's way of reacting to things that are happening to us, both inside and outside. We have up to 50,000 a day!**
- **Everybody has weird, scary, inappropriate or rude thoughts popping into their head from time to time.**
- **We can have positive, neutral and negative intrusive thoughts. They aren't facts.**

**Help the young person to sit with their negative thoughts and then let them go and/or 'boss' them back**

- **If we allow ourselves to think about these thoughts (without reacting) they eventually lose their power**
- **Mindfulness techniques can help us to sit with them**
- **Or we can 'boss' them back with positive self-talk (e.g. "*I am the boss, not OCD*", "*I've beaten you once I can do it again*", "*I don't have to listen to you*" etc.)**

# Questions & Reflections



# References

- Dr Zoe Kindynis & Dr Kelly Wood, Clinical Psychologists. *CBT for Children and Young People with OCD*. National Specialist CAMHS for OCD, BDD & Related Disorders, South London and Maudsley NHS Trust. Talk at Anna Freud Centre on 30/01/2020.
- Waite, P., & Williams, T. (2009). *Obsessive Compulsive Disorder: Cognitive Behavioural Therapy with Children & Young People*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Turner, C., Krebs, G., & Volz, C. (2019). *OCD: Tools to help Young People Fight Back! A Manual for CBT Therapists*. London, UK: Jessica Kingsley

# Further information & advice

## ◆ OCD Action

<https://ocdaction.org.uk/learn-about-ocd/>

