

Book Review: Obsessive Compulsive Disorder for Dummies, by Charles Elliot, PhD and Laura Smith, PhD



Reviewed by Deb Osgood-Hynes, PsyD

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Continuing the "For Dummies" book series, authors Charles Elliot, Ph.D. and Laura Smith, Ph.D. offer practical information to help readers understand the nature of OCD and methods of treatment. Whether you are an individual struggling with OCD, a family member or friend of someone with OCD, or a clinician seeking more information, the authors provide a comprehensive review presented in an easy-to-read self-help format. Gentle humor throughout the book combined with bite-size subsections of information within each chapter (highlights, side bars, bullets and case examples) help to pull the reader through the vast extent of information offered.

Part I (The Ins and Outs of OCD) captures the essence of OCD doubts and uncertainty experienced, and covers what is and what is not OCD. What is currently known about the biological basis of OCD is discussed and a review is offered of learning principles which can contribute to an increase of OCD symptoms.

Are you seeking motivation to take the beginning steps? Do you fear change or have a fear of facing your worries? Then Part II (Starting Down the Treatment Path) will help, as it offers ideas to take on the challenge of pursuing cognitive and behavioral treatment and discusses ways people limit their efforts toward symptom reduction. Chapter 6 emphasizes that change is not always smooth or easy. This section also includes a useful discussion on choosing the right professional when seeking OCD treatment and questions to ask when evaluating a mental health professional.

Part III (Overcoming OCD) covers information about cognitive therapy, behavioral therapy (exposure and response prevention), medication treatment and relapse prevention. Specific narratives and exposure and response prevention hierarchy examples are supplied to assist with application of the concepts to the reader's personal needs. Also useful is the concept of "staging a fire drill" to predict times when relapse may occur, with intervention strategies recommended to reduce the likelihood of increased symptoms in the future.

Are you searching for an in-depth review of various OCD subtypes such as checking, just-so OCD, and hoarding, to name a few? If so, then turn to Part IV (Targeting Specific Symptoms of OCD). The importance of this section lies in the variety of ideas offered to create exposure and response prevention (ERP) hierarchy steps. For those with kids or family members with OCD, Part V (Assisting Others with OCD) offers assistance to parents and discusses how family and friends can serve as an OCD coach. Part VI (The Part of the Tens) offers brief creative ideas to continue the treatment journey such as ten quick OCD tricks or ten steps to take after you get better.

The information provided within these chapters is invaluable to those seeking knowledge about OCD. Given the format of the book, it is not necessary to read this book sequentially from front to back cover in order to take advantage of the material within. It is a useful self-help reference that can be opened to almost any section to find tidbits that can be immediately incorporated into symptom reduction efforts.

One of the many strengths of this book is the way in which cognitive therapy interventions are creatively infused throughout the text regardless of chapter. However, a cautionary tip should be provided on when not to use self-talk strategies. For some people who engage in excessive analyzing, productive OCD challenges can shift to unproductive excessive self-reassurance mental rituals performed in an effort to reduce uncomfortable

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(Obsessive Compulsive for Dummies, continued)

doubt and uncertainty generated by an obsession. Additionally, while another positive of this book is its thoroughness of scope, readers seeking a workbook style walk-through of step-by-step strategy application may find it more challenging to sort through the amount of information offered. Chapter 10 provides good fear hierarchy examples with additional forms to assist ERP efforts located in Appendix B. Many more potential ERP ideas (a few in step hierarchy format) are offered in the chapters which target specific symptoms of OCD. Those having difficulty extrapolating from the text to create personal ERP hierarchies will want to seek assistance from a trained mental health professional, as noted by the authors. Finally, while I liked the discussion in Chapter 4 about OCD brain biology as well as the review of selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors in Chapter 11, the book appears to present a slight treatment bias. The chapter on medications did discuss benefits of medication, as well as the benefit of combining medication with cognitive behavioral therapy, however there appeared to be a hesitancy in advocating for psychopharmacological interventions as an important treatment option regardless of OCD severity, as noted by comments such as “most experts in OCD agree that psychological treatment is the preferred choice for most cases of OCD,” followed by a section stating medication usefulness for severe OCD, and then a section discussing the risks of medication prior to actually discussing the potential usefulness of medication. Information frequently sought out in treatment and not addressed in this chapter were typical dose ranges for medications, a more detailed description of medication augmenting protocols, and medications for kids versus medications for adults.

Given the extent of good information found within, I would definitely recommend this book to consumers and clinicians seeking information about OCD. The book *OCD for Dummies* is instructive and informative. It stays close to empirically validated treatment strategies. Anyone who reads this book will find themselves more empowered with knowledge about OCD and have numerous useful tools to reduce their OCD symptoms. It is a good resource to have in any OCD information library.

IOCDF Institutional Member Updates

IOCDF Institutional Members are all programs that offer more than traditional outpatient therapy for those who need higher levels of care. We are pleased to announce the addition of two new Institutional Members:

OCD and Anxiety Treatment Center

Program Director: Steven Pence, PhD, LLC

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New Port Richey, FL 34655

Phone: (727) 569-2239

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E-mail: spence@ocdandanxietytreatment.com

Website: www.ocdandanxietytreatment.com



The Lindner Center of Hope

Program Director: Charles Brady, PhD, ABPP

The Lindner Center of Hope

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E-mail: charles.brady@lindnercenter.org

Website: www.lindnercenterofhope.org



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