The Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health

Family Accommodation in Childhood OCD and Anxiety

Families often step in to ease a child's distress. In OCD and anxiety, some of these responses may help keep the symptoms going.

What accommodation can look like

- Joining in or helping with rituals
- Giving repeated reassurance
- Changing family routines around the symptoms
- Helping the child avoid situations that provoke anxiety
- Staying home with the child or sleeping beside them to ease separation fears

Short-term relief, longer-term cost

In the moment

the child's distress eases and family tension may settle.

Over time

avoidance and rituals may be reinforced, and accommodation has been linked to greater impairment.

Accommodation can work against the main goal of exposure-based CBT, which is learning to tolerate distress without avoiding it or performing rituals. Recognising it, and understanding how it may maintain symptoms, is an important part of assessment and treatment planning.



Join Professor John Piacentini to explore OCD and anxiety in children and young people.

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