

Understanding Autism, ADHD and OCD

Neurodiversity and Everyday Support



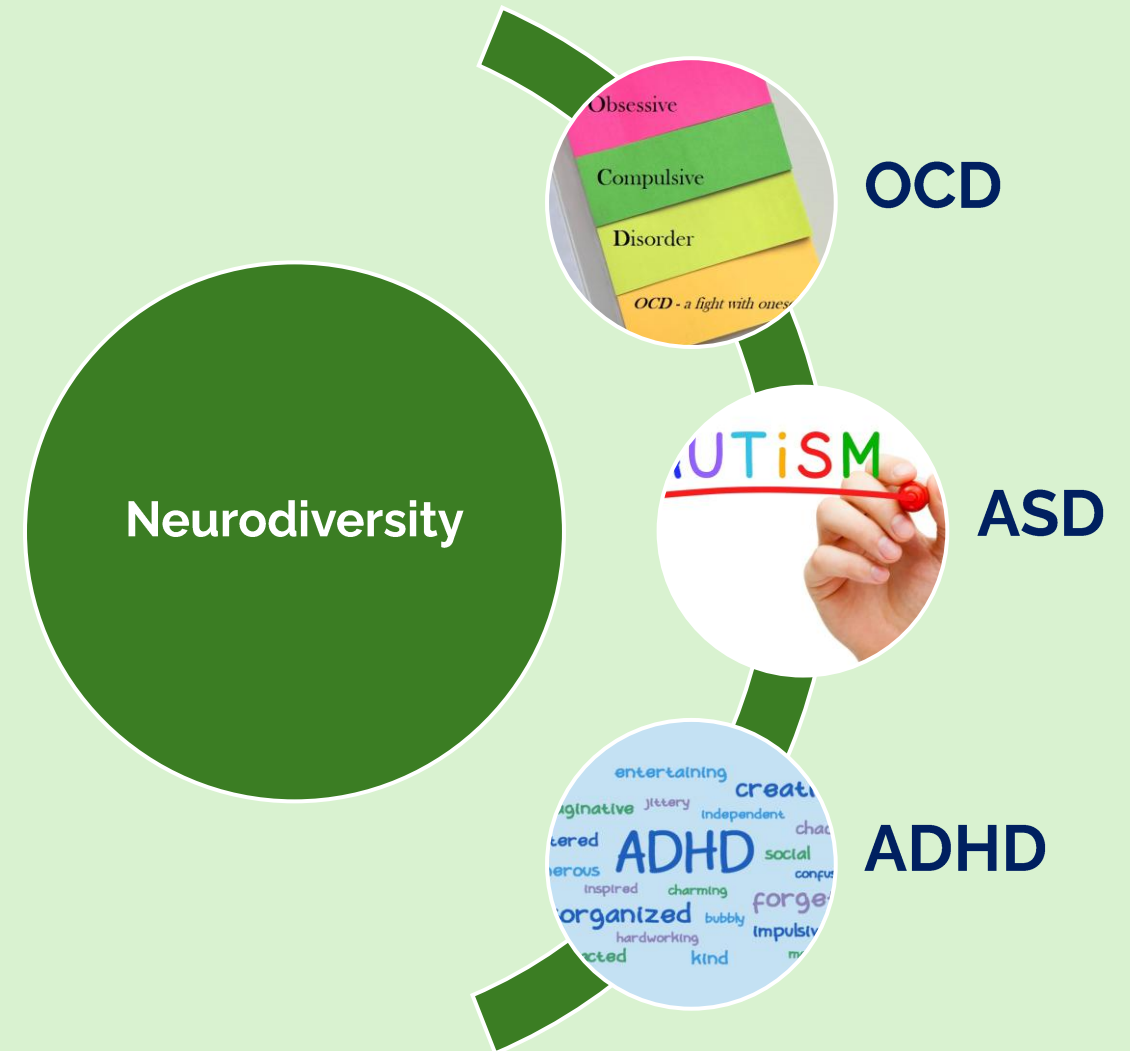
Support and solutions
for you and your employees



Aims and Objectives

- Understand the basics of Neurodiversity, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) , Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD).
- Explore similarities and differences with OCD, ASD and ADHD.
- Challenge stigma and misconceptions.
- Learn about practical support strategies and signpost to support resources.

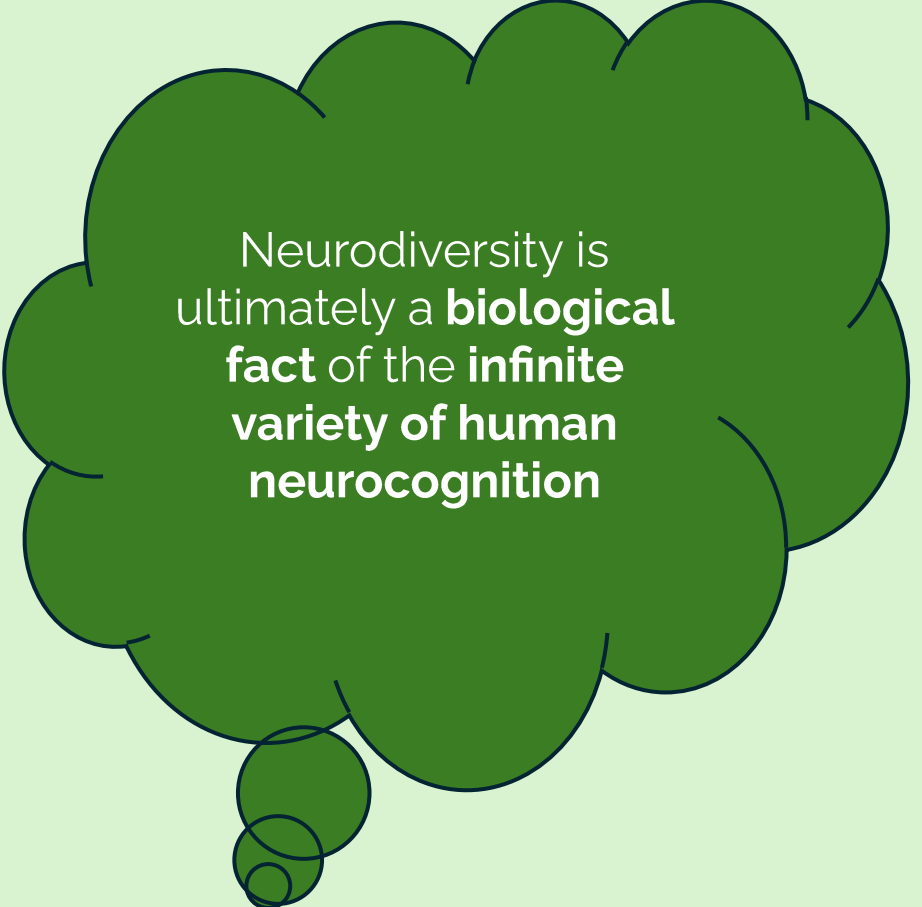
Understand the Basics of Neurodiversity, Autism, ADHD and OCD



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What is Neurodiversity?

- Neurological differences are natural human variation
- Includes Autism, ADHD, Dyslexia, OCD (from a neurodivergent perspective rather than clinical perspective), Tourette's, etc
- Strength-based lens: innovation, creativity, focus
- The opposite of neurotypical



Neurodiversity is ultimately a **biological fact** of the **infinite variety of human neurocognition**



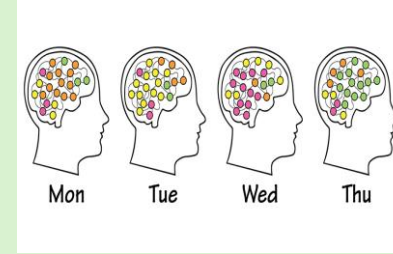
Defining Autism : Key Characteristics



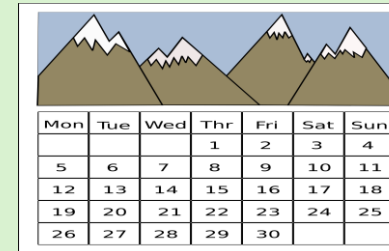
Social Communication – differences in interaction patterns and communication styles may appear early



90% of people will experience differences in how **sensory information** is processed.

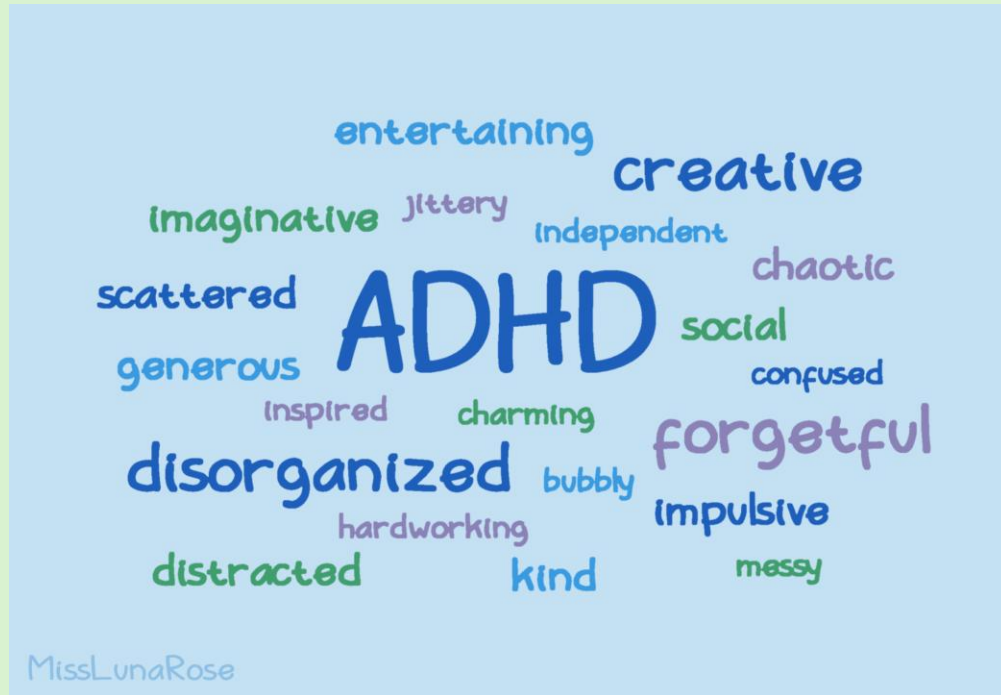


Repetitive behaviours, focussed, sometimes intense interests and repeated movements provide comfort.



Early development – signs typically appear before 3 years of age, with a higher diagnosis in males.

Defining ADHD : Key Characteristics



Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is defined as a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity that interferes with functioning or development.

The definition requires that symptoms:

- Start before 12 years of age.
- Occur in two or more settings, such as at home and school.
- Have been present for at least 6 months.
- Interfere with, or reduce the quality of social, academic or occupational functioning.
- Do not occur exclusively during a psychotic disorder and are not better explained by another mental disorder.

NICE.org

Inattention

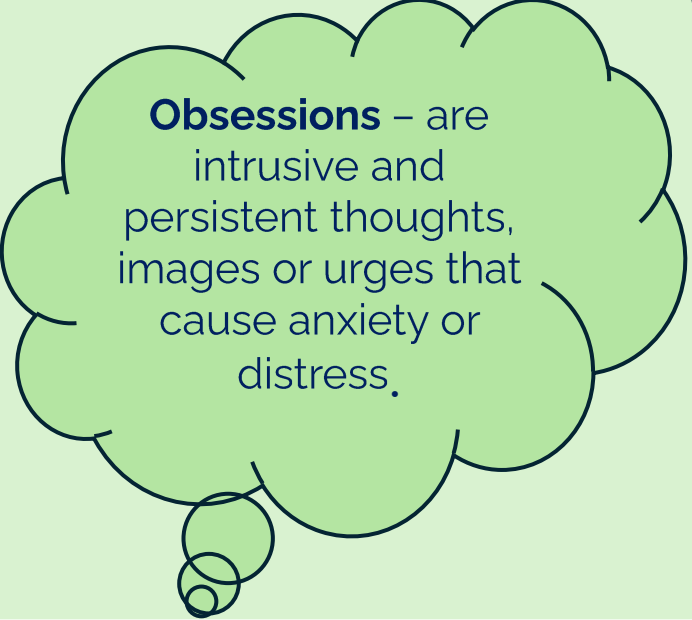
Hyperactivity

Impulsivity

Understanding OCD

Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is a mental health problem. It has two main parts that are connected: obsessions and compulsions.

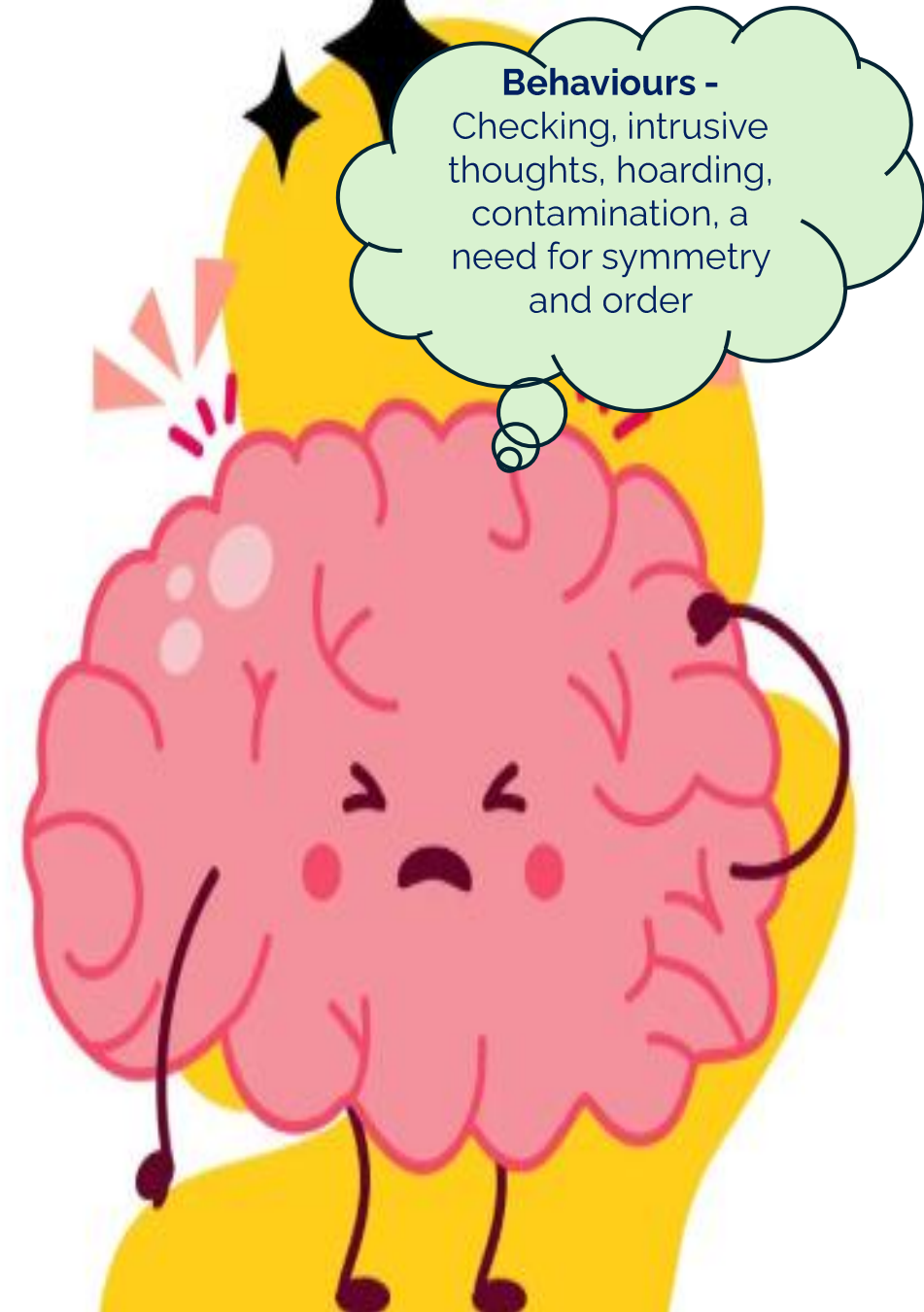
Mind UK



Obsessions – are intrusive and persistent thoughts, images or urges that cause anxiety or distress.



Compulsions – are repetitive behaviours or mental acts performed to reduce the anxiety caused by the obsessions



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Obsessive Compulsive Disorder - OCD

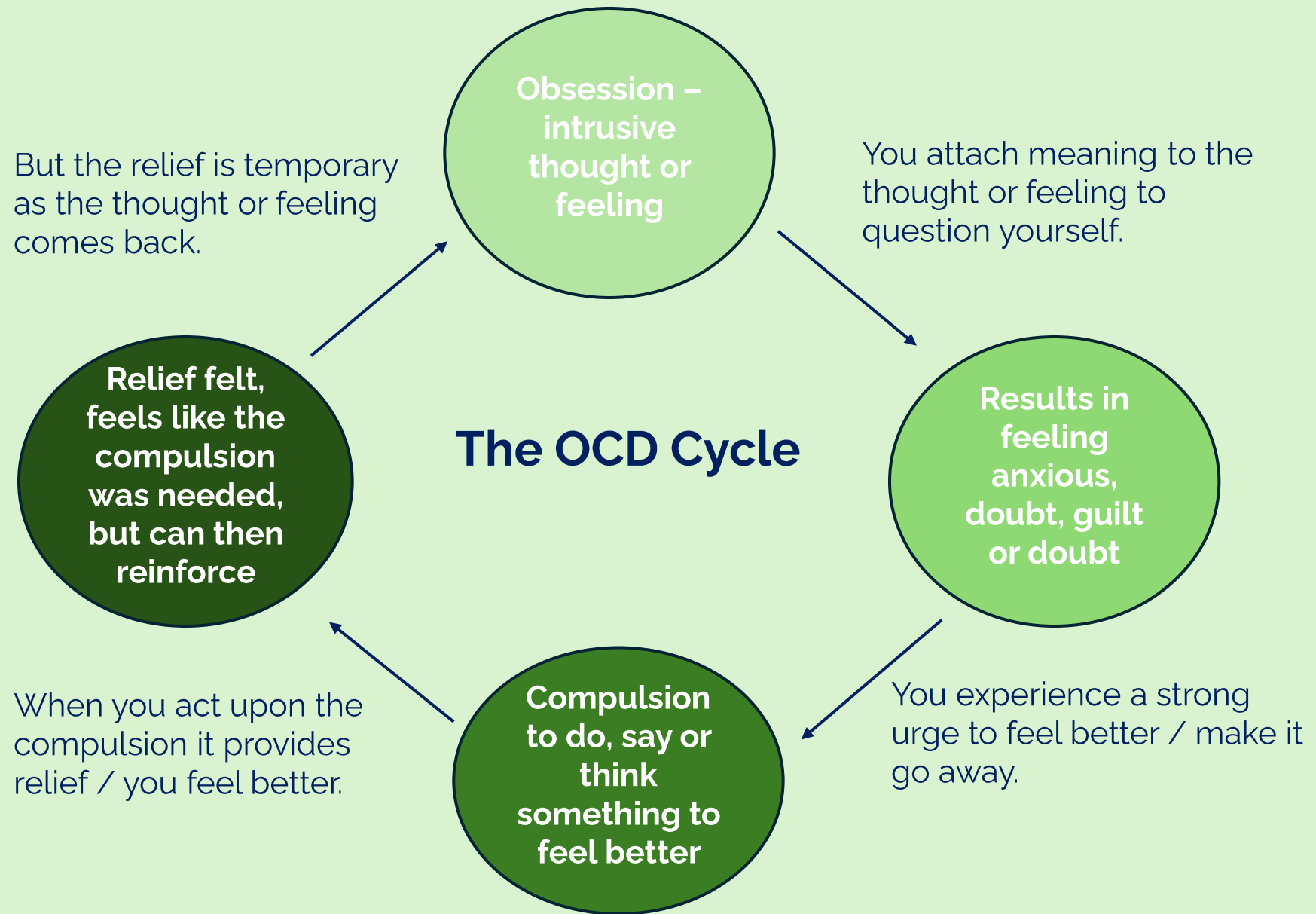
- Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) is a mental health condition where a person has obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviours.
- OCD can affect men, women and children. People can start having symptoms from as early as 6 years old, but it often begins around puberty and early adulthood.
- OCD can be distressing and significantly interfere with your life, but treatment can help you keep it under control.
- An obsession is an unwanted and unpleasant thought, image or urge that repeatedly enters your mind, causing feelings of anxiety, disgust or unease.
- A compulsion is a repetitive behaviour or mental act that you feel you need to do to temporarily relieve the unpleasant feelings brought on by the obsessive thought.

NHS 2023 – www.nhs.uk

~~mind~~ mind

What is
OCD?





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NEUROSCIENCE OF OCD



**2-MINUTE
NEUROSCIENCE**

ORBITOFRONTAL

**OBSESSIVE-COMPULSIVE
DISORDER (OCD)**

Causes of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and Impact

No clear causation, but can include:

- Family history
- Differences in the brain
- Life events
- Personality

Impacts Include:

- Disruption to every- day life
- Impact on relationships
- Impact on mental health,
- Self esteem and anxiety



Similar Mental Health problems to OCD?

- Body dysmorphic disorder (BDD)
- Excoriation (skin picking)
- Trichotillomania (hair pulling disorder)
- Hoarding
- Perinatal OCD
- Personality disorder (can have associated traits)
- Eating problems / disorders



**Let's explore
OCD and
Neurodiversity!**

OCD

ASD

ADHD

Let's explore the
similarities and
differences

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OCD and Neurodiversity

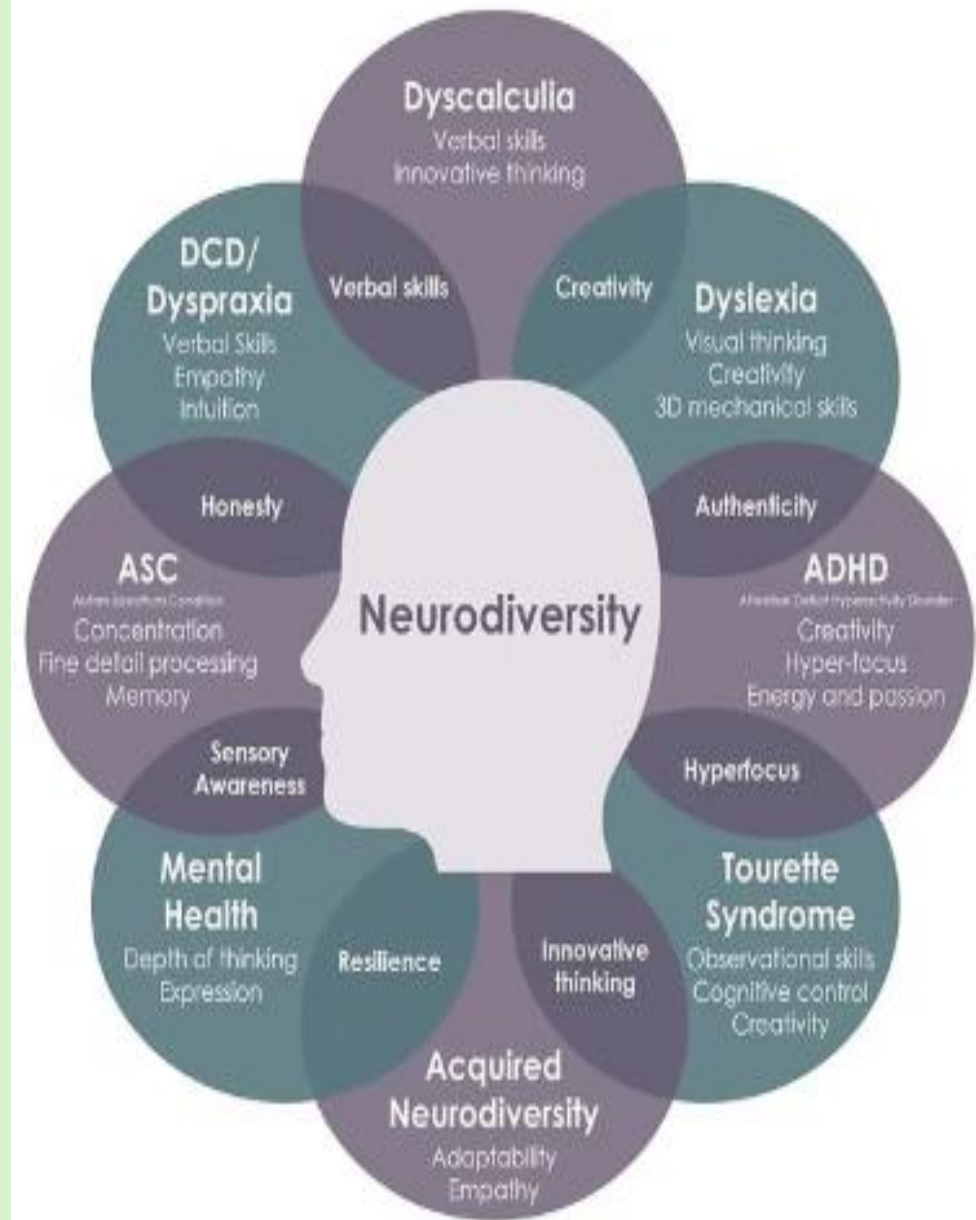
There are many different ways neurodivergence can manifest.

As there are no medical criteria or definitions of what it means to be neurodivergent, many conditions can fall under the category of neurodivergent and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is one of them.

OCD can be viewed as **neurodiverse in origin** because it satisfies the primary criteria of a neurodivergent disorder – people with OCD have a brain that processes and behaves differently from what is considered typical.

Simple Psychology. Org

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Created by Dr Nancy Doyle based on the work of Mary Colley



mindfriend

mindfriend

repetitive compulsions

4 X

People with diagnosis of OCD 4 X more likely to be Autistic. ([Meier et al., 2015](#)).



Both groups have sensory processing differences

2 X

Autistic people are 2x more likely to have OCD

ASD and OCD Co- Occurrence



Both groups engage in repetitive behaviours (but serve differing purposes)

17%

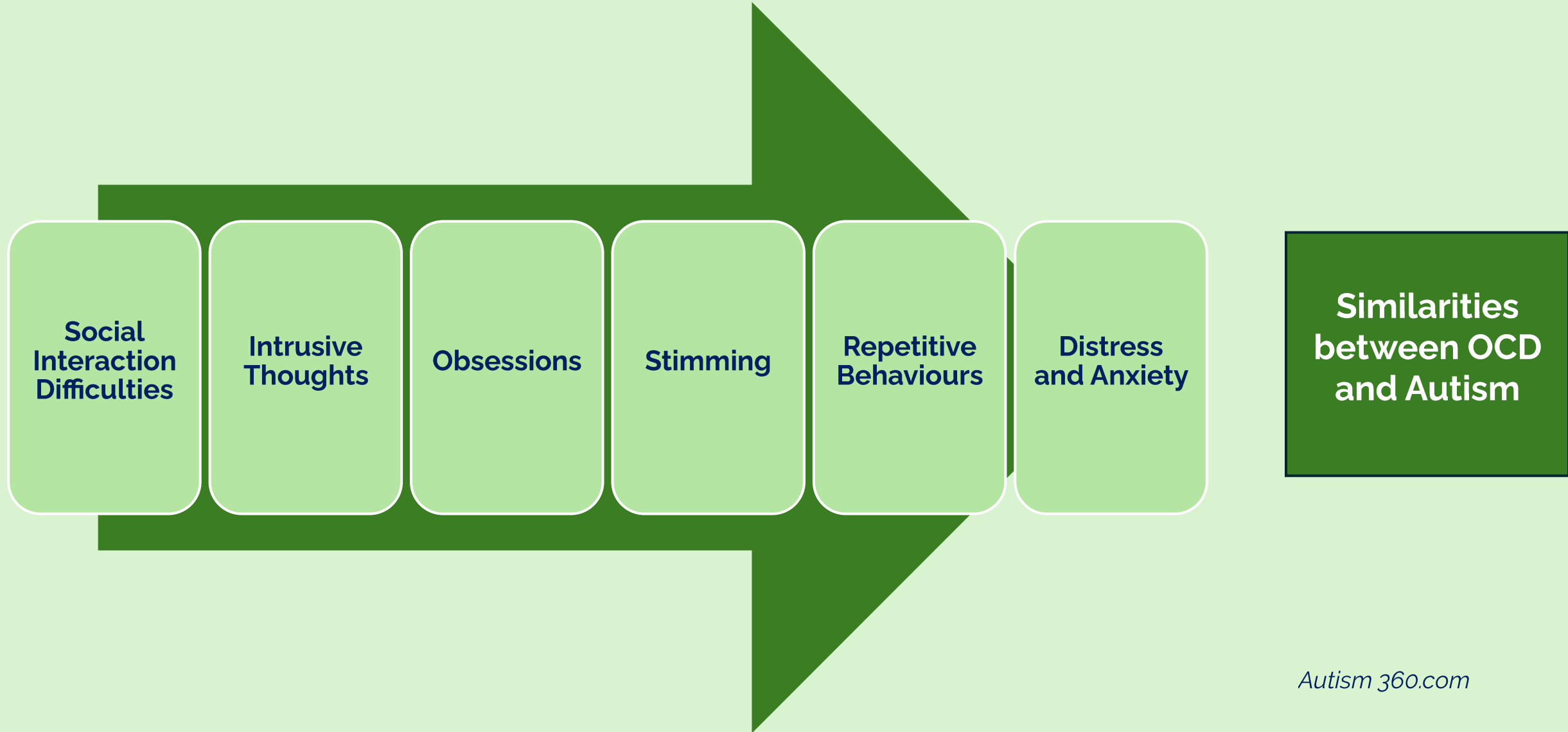
Around 17% of people with Autism also have OCD



Both groups experience increased levels of compulsions



OCD and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)



Autism 360.com

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OCD and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Differences between ASD and OCD

Onset and
Course

Ego-
Dystonic v
Ego-
Syntonic
Thoughts

What is
behind the
repetitive
movements

Social and
Communication
challenges

	Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)	Obsessive- CompulsiveDisorder OCD
Core Symptoms	Differences in social interaction and communication with repetitive behaviours and sensory sensitivities	Obsessions which are often intrusive and distressing leading to rituals to reduce the anxiety called compulsions.
Causation	Neurodevelopmental and present from early childhood. Genetic and environmental factors are involved	Genetic and environmental with presentation often later in childhood, adolescence or adulthood.
The Behavioural Function	Often self soothing, pleasurable as provides sensory regulation. There is a preference for predictability and routine behaviours.	With OCD the behaviour is anxiety driven to relieve the distress that is being caused by the obsessive thoughts. Often experienced as a cycle, as discussed earlier.
Diagnosis	ADOS (Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule) with developmental history and clinical observation.	Currently several different methods to assess obsessive compulsive symptoms including diagnostic interviews, clinically administered inventories and self / parent report methods.
Support / Treatment	Treatment not required, support may include strength- based interventions that are person led in design.	CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy) often exposure and response prevention. If not ready for this SSRIs may be prescribed to support.
What Motivates the Behaviour?	Behaviours are often self soothing, sensory driven and pleasurable i.e. stimming.	Behaviours are driven by anxiety, fear or distress and compulsions aimed at relief of such.

A medium shot of a man with dark hair, wearing a black zip-up jacket, speaking against a blue background. He is gesturing with his right hand. A teal subtitle box is positioned in the lower center of the frame.

but surprisingly,



The presence of both conditions often leads to higher rates of hoarding (Sheppard 2010)

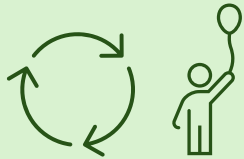


OCD places further demands on executive functioning with ADHD



For people with both OCD and ADHD their OCD symptoms are often more pronounced

ADHD and OCD Co- Occurrence



ADHD is linked with earlier presentation of OCD typically in early childhood (Brem, 2014)

8-25%

An estimated 8-25% of people with OCD also have ADHD (Brem, 2014)



1 in 5 children with OCD also has ADHD according to Abramovitch and Mittleman's study in 2013.

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ADHD and OCD – Overlapping Traits

- Work and academic difficulties
- Sensory sensitivities
- Intrusive thoughts
- Attention impacts
- Skin picking and hair pulling
- Mood disorders and self harm
- Eating disorders
- Sleep
- Gastrointestinal issues



ADHD

VS

OCD



https://youtu.be/ntY-_dzZxC8

Challenge Stigma and Misconceptions



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Misconceptions and Stigma (OCD)

- OCD is about being overly clean and organised
- It's a minor personality quirk or its about preference
- Compulsions are always physical actions
- OCD is quite rare
- Everyone has a 'little OCD'
- It's just a phase that will go on its own!
- OCD is about character and willpower.
- Its untreatable
- Avoiding the triggers will cure OCD
- OCD is the same for everyone!

International OCD Foundation

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Learn about practical support strategies and signpost to support resources.





LEARN MORE ABOUT

**PSYCHOTHERAPY
AND PSYCHOLOGY**

Support Resources - OCD

- **OCD UK** – have their annual conference on the 8th November in Nottingham-[OCD-UK | A national OCD charity, run by, and for people with lived experience of OCD contact on 01332 588 112](#)
- **OCD Action** – have a helpline Monday to Friday 9.30am to 8pm and a contact form. 0300 636 5478 and [Helpline - OCD Action](#)
- **Hoarding UK** offer help for people affected by hoarding including support groups. [Hoarding UK | Promoting Choice & Control since 2008](#)
- **Mind UK** – have a range of materials available and links to other support services. [OCD useful contacts | Types of mental health problems | Mind](#)
- **Hub of Hope** – UK wide mental health service database. Let's you search for local, national, peer, community, charity, private and NHS mental health support. You can filter results to find specific kinds of support. [Mental Health Support Network provided by Chasing the Stigma | Hub of hope](#)

Support Resources *(similar mental health conditions to OCD)*

Perinatal OCD -MIND (2020). Perinatal OCD. [online] www.mind.org.uk. Available at: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/postnatal-depression-and-perinatal-mental-health/perinatal-ocd/>

Trichotillomania (TTM) and Compulsive Skin Picking- Ocdaction.org.uk. (2025). Body-Focused Repetitive Behaviours – OCD Action. [online] Available at: <https://ocdaction.org.uk/resources/bfrb/>

Body Dysmorphic Disorder - www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/body-dysmorphic-disorder-bdd/about-bdd/

Hoarding - www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/hoarding/.

Personality Disorder - www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/personality-disorder/diagnosing-personality-disorder/

Eating Disorders -www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/eating-problems/about-eating-problems/

Please take a minute to put into the chat one or two things you will take away with you or found most useful today.



Thank you



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