



## Playing Well with Others

Relearning childhood lessons to enhance adult relationships

At an early age, our parents and teachers gave most of us some basic instructions to help us relate better with our peers. Oddly enough, we often forget to use this advice when it's needed most.

### Four Lessons Worth Relearning

#### 1. Be patient

Sometimes we get caught up in the need to get things accomplished—or we can become overwhelmed by a childlike attitude that our needs must be addressed now. We're usually not even aware that we're acting in this way.

Take a couple of deep breaths and be patient. Also, be aware of other people's needs and try to put things in perspective. Ask yourself: "Can this wait?" If so, find another task to complete while you await a response.

#### 2. Wait your turn

This used to be helpful guidance on the playground. Now, it's good advice when we're having a conversation: try to wait your turn to speak. Allow the other person the opportunity to say what he or she needs to say. Actively listen and hear the thoughts and opinions being expressed. You can then respond once the other person has finished.

#### 3. Use your words ("I" statements)

As children, when adults said "use your words," the original idea was to use your words rather than being physical with someone. For adults, it can be adjusted to "use your words wisely." And, one way you can do this is by using "I" statements. An "I" statement establishes an important shift of perspective and responsibility to let the other person know how things look

from where you're standing, rather than foisting blame—"You did XYZ to me."

It follows a simple formula. "I feel <state your emotion or feeling> when you <state the other person's behavior>, because I imagine <state the assumption that you make when the person does the behavior>." For example, "I feel unsafe when you raise your voice, because I imagine you might become physical with me."

#### 4. Share

Sharing is not only beneficial for fostering better relationships; it's good for your spirit and can be uplifting, too. There are lots of ways that you can be generous: with your time (visiting a friend in the hospital or volunteering), with your hospitality (inviting people over for a meal or socializing), or with your money (donating to a worthy cause).



# Pet Perks

Pulitzer Prize-winning author Edith Wharton once referred to her little dog as “**a heartbeat at my feet.**” What she may not have known, however, is that her pet was probably good for her own heartbeat.

Research over the last 25 years on the physical and psychological health benefits of having pets has increasingly pointed to the conclusion that while we're taking care of our pets, they're also helping to take care of us.

According to the American Heart Association, having a pet can reduce your blood pressure, cholesterol levels, and triglyceride levels. At the same time, pets can help increase your opportunities for exercise and socialization, and help to ward off feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Researchers funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) studied 2,000 adults and concluded that dog owners who regularly walk their dogs were more physically active and less likely to be obese. Another study of 240 married couples found that those who owned a pet tended to have lower heart rates and blood pressure.

You may be able to make more friends with the help of man's best friend, too. Various studies are correlating walking your dog with more conversations and greater social connectivity. And, study after study confirms that those with more social

relationships tend to live longer and healthier lives.

A study of more than 2,500 older adults showed that those who regularly walked their dogs had greater mobility inside their homes, and walked faster for longer time periods each week than those who didn't own dogs. Another NIH-funded study of adults who had experienced a heart attack showed dog owners were more likely to be alive a year later than those who did not own dogs.

Recent research also appears to contradict the notion that young children with pets in the home are more likely to have animal allergies. An increasing number of studies have indicated that children growing up in a home with a pet cat or dog—or even on a farm with large animals—will have a lower risk of allergies and asthma.

These benefits to your level of physical activity, immune system, and emotional health prove the importance of having a pet in your life. So, take good care of the pets that are taking such good care of you.



# Living with OCD

The symptoms of obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) are highly treatable. There's no need to live with the high degree of discomfort experienced in the thoughts and behavior, which are part and parcel of the disorder.

OCD is associated with uneasiness or irritability about unwelcome thoughts, urges, or impulses that cause anxiety or distress. People with OCD attempt to manage these anxieties through repetitive actions or behaviors they feel obliged to perform.

## Intrusive thoughts

You may think about something excessively and unendingly—the obsessive side of OCD. Or, you may feel constrained to do or say certain things—the compulsive side of the equation. The compulsion is usually related directly with the obsessive thoughts.

## Ritualistic behavior

Ritualistic or compulsive behavior—such as repetitive hand washing—may attempt to relieve the nervousness caused by unwanted and obsessive thoughts—such as the fear of germs and getting sick.

Other common obsessive thoughts are about safety. “I need to double check the backdoor three times before I leave the house. Then the house will not get broken into.” This example shows how compulsive behavior can be triggered by the obsessive thought that the house might be burglarized. The anxiety this causes is eased by the person being extra responsible and double—even triple—checking that the house is locked.

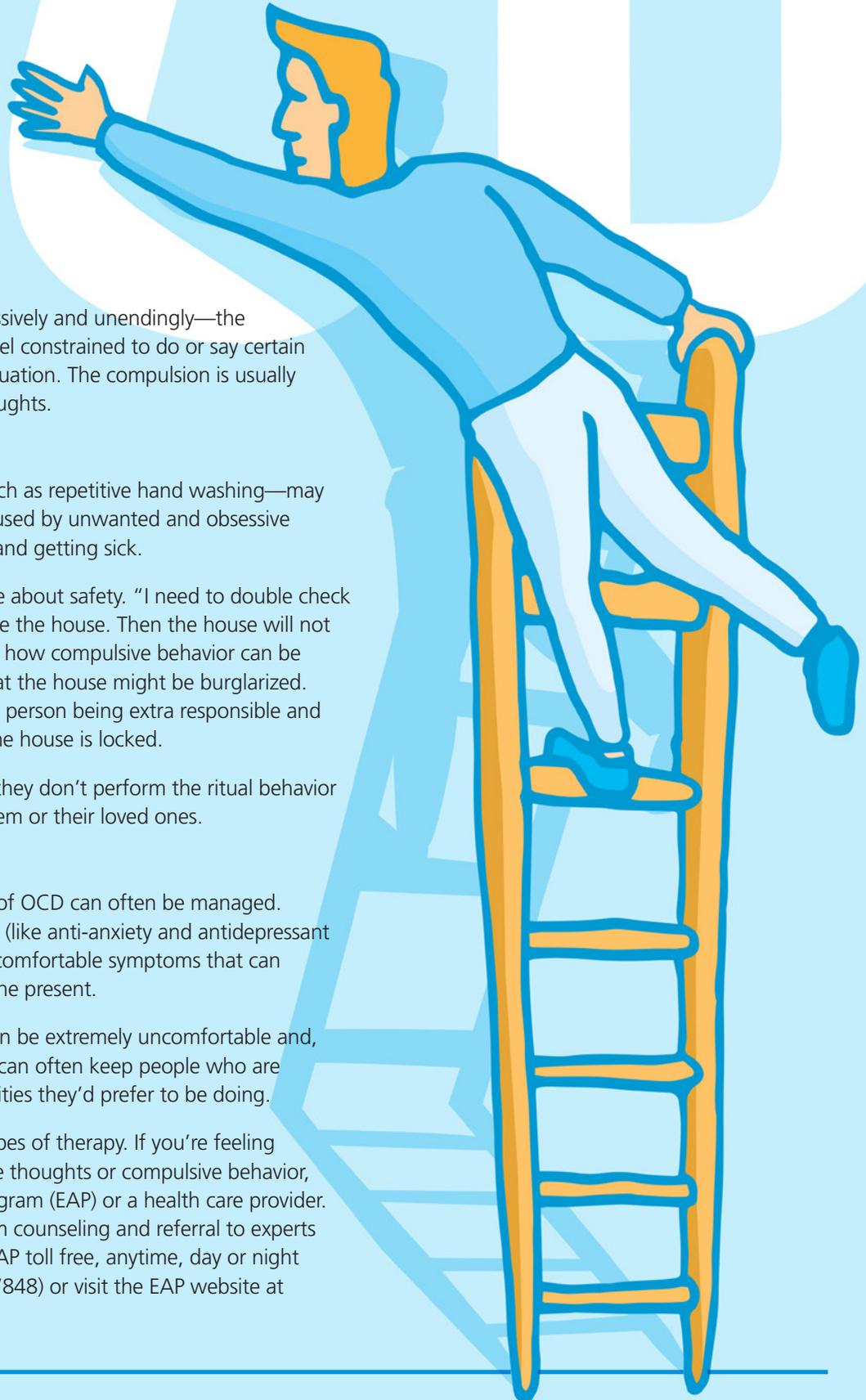
Often people with OCD worry that if they don't perform the ritual behavior that something bad will happen to them or their loved ones.

## Living with OCD

The good news is that the symptoms of OCD can often be managed. Through therapy or prescription drugs (like anti-anxiety and antidepressant medications), one can address the uncomfortable symptoms that can prevent you from living more fully in the present.

Depending on its seriousness, OCD can be extremely uncomfortable and, at times, overwhelming. The disorder can often keep people who are experiencing it from doing those activities they'd prefer to be doing.

OCD responds well to the available types of therapy. If you're feeling overwhelmed by recurring unwelcome thoughts or compulsive behavior, contact your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or a health care provider. Your EAP can help you with short-term counseling and referral to experts who treat these conditions. Call the EAP toll free, anytime, day or night at **1-800-222-0364** (TTY: 1-888-262-7848) or visit the EAP website at **[www.FOH4You.com](http://www.FOH4You.com)** to learn more.



# OFFICE HEALTH: PREVENTING CARPAL TUNNEL SYNDROME

As with many conditions, it's better to prevent carpal tunnel syndrome before it becomes chronic.

We often associate carpal tunnel syndrome with using a keyboard, but any repetitive, small movement can cause it—such as playing certain musical instruments. Carpal tunnel syndrome occurs when the median nerve in the arm and hand becoming compressed or inflamed.

## GOOD ALIGNMENT

Make sure that your keyboard is in a position that keeps you from bending your wrists too much as you type. Your palms should be in line with your forearm, allowing your fingers to type without causing you to flex your wrists.

## EXPERT ADVICE

Your first expert is your health care provider. If you think you are experiencing carpal tunnel syndrome, make an appointment as soon as possible.

Your next expert is an ergonomics specialist. You can ask a contact in your human resources area about the availability of an ergonomics specialist to make sure that your workstation is well set up and that you're not putting undue strain on your wrists—or your neck, for that matter—as you go through your day.

---

You can think of the ergonomics specialist as a tailor that helps you make your workstation fit right.

---

If your work environment doesn't fit you, this can affect your efficiency and—when it comes to carpal tunnel syndrome—your health. An ergonomics specialist may recommend a way to adjust your keyboard to prevent your wrists from being strained while you're typing. He or she may also change the height of your monitor to keep your neck comfortable.

## STRETCHING

Try the following exercise to help stop the median nerve from becoming compressed. Start by stretching your arms straight out in front of you with your palms facing away from you and your fingers pointed toward the ceiling. Then, gently pull your fingers back towards you, feeling a moderate and comfortable stretch in the palm. You can use one hand to stretch the other hand by slowly and gently pulling the fingers back toward you.

Take steps to prevent carpal tunnel syndrome or detect it early on so you can stay pain-free at your keyboard and when doing the activities you enjoy most.



This newsletter is brought to you by the Federal Occupational Health (FOH) Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The EAP provides assessment, counseling, referral, management consultation, and coaching services to Federal employees and agencies throughout the United States. For administrative details about the program, contact Chiquita Cooper at 404-562-7950, ext. 125, or email [Chiquita.Cooper@foh.hhs.gov](mailto:Chiquita.Cooper@foh.hhs.gov). To visit us on the Web, please go to [FOH4You.com](http://FOH4You.com).

Help is available all day, all week, all year. **1-800-222-0364**, TTY: 1-888-262-7848.

*Let's Talk* is available electronically at [FOH.hhs.gov/eapnews](http://FOH.hhs.gov/eapnews).

---

## FEDERAL OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

*The Occupational Health Provider of Choice for the Federal Government*

FOH is dedicated to its mission of improving the health, safety, and productivity of our Federal employees. Created by Congress in 1946, FOH is a non-appropriated service agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

FOH offers a full range of occupational health services—including Clinical, Wellness/Fitness, Employee Assistance and Work/Life Programs, Organization Development, and Environmental Health and Safety programs—exclusively to Federal employees.

Visit FOH on the Web at [FOH.hhs.gov](http://FOH.hhs.gov) and [FOH.hhs.gov/Calendar](http://FOH.hhs.gov/Calendar).