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The information and techniques offered in this excerpt should not be used as a replacement for guidance, consultation, assessment or treatment by a qualified mental health professional.

Red flags for Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder in School

- ❑ Excessive focus on having things neat and tidy. Lining up, ordering or arranging items on desks, in backpacks or lockers repeatedly.
- ❑ Undue distress and frustration when things are disorganized, when interrupted in seemingly minor activities or when routines change unexpectedly.
- ❑ Uncharacteristic sloppiness or carelessness in completing assignments.
- ❑ Rigidity about “perfect” performance and inability to reach excessively high self-imposed standards.
- ❑ Erasing repeatedly until the paper has holes in it, the ink is smudged and the writing or drawing is illegible.
- ❑ Very slow and deliberate work, resulting in incomplete assignments.
- ❑ Tardiness or school refusal. Arriving late to school habitually or missing school altogether. The child is generally at home, not truant.
- ❑ Inability to proceed with or complete tasks. Assignments or tasks that are clearly within the child’s capability are not completed due to repetitive rituals such as checking, re-reading or counting.
- ❑ Fatigue and drowsiness due to lack of sleep or “working the night shift” of rituals.
- ❑ Frequent trips to the bathroom. Frequent urinary urges for which no medical problem can be found may be obsessive urges to “clean out” the bladder. It is important that a medical cause for the urges be ruled out.
- ❑ Counting or focus on lucky and unlucky numbers.
- ❑ Sudden avoidance of familiar things or reluctance to try new things. Fears of contamination, death or harm may coerce children into avoiding potential triggers that are not always intuitive or logically connected to the fear.
- ❑ Odd behaviors such as walking in specific patterns through doorways, counting tiles or syllables, touching or tapping in symmetry or sitting and standing repeatedly may be “just right” rituals.
- ❑ Frequent checking of the book bag, lockers, pockets, or under the desk and chair.
- ❑ Opening doors, lockers, desks, or books with elbows or with tissue in hand, holding hands in the air to avoid physical contact, refusal to shake hands or share pencils or other supplies may reflect contamination fears.

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