

The Touching Tree

Leader's Guide

Subjects: OCD, behavioral studies, psychology, guidance, counseling

Audience: Mental Health Professionals, Patient Education, Classroom Teachers, In-service Training, Daycare Personnel & Parents

Length: 38 mins.

Content

A dramatic presentation of the life of a child suffering with OCD (Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder). This video will sensitize non-suffers and promote a better understanding of the disease from both a clinical and personal perspective. Terry, a young boy, is trapped in an endless cycle of repetitive behavior and is powerless to stop. He is ridiculed by those that do not understand the disease. With the help of a sympathetic teacher and therapist, the child learns to work through his disorder as the viewers come to understand the nature of OCD.

Discussion Topics

General Audience Questions:

1. What does OCD mean?
2. If a person has OCD, why can't they just control themselves and stop the disruptive behavior?
3. What are some of the examples in the film of OCD?
4. Describe the experiment Mr. Cavanaugh does. Why does he do this? Would you like to try this experiment? Can you wash your hands for ten minutes? Don't let anything interrupt you. How do you feel?
5. Why does Terry feel comfortable acting? Why does he miss the opening night of the performance?
6. How does Terry see himself in the picture he draws? Why does he draw himself this way? How does he feel about himself?
7. How do the other kids treat Terry? Do you know any kids like Terry?
8. When someone is being "disruptive" or behaving inappropriately, what assumptions do you make about that person? Why is it important to be careful about making these kinds of assumptions?
9. How would you feel if you felt you were different from your classmates?
10. How does Terry begin to change? Is this hard for him? Have you ever tried to change your behavior or a negative habit? Describe the experience.

Clinical Questions:

1. OCD is a neuro-biological disorder characterized by obsessive and ritualistic thinking and behavior that causes distress and disrupts one's life on a daily basis. What are the major differences between obsessions and compulsions? What are some of the compulsions (rituals) that Terry exhibits in the film?
2. Terry's self-esteem appeared to be affected by the OCD as seen in his depressed and withdrawn behavior. What are some other ways that OCD can affect a child's self-esteem? What are some of the ways Terry's self-esteem was restored?
3. Why is it important to educate health care professionals, the parents and teachers, as well as the child who has OCD, about the nature of the disorder?
4. OCD often affects the child's performance in school. How does it differ from a learning disability for which the child is placed into special education classes?
5. Terry's mother and teachers did not apply harsh punishment when he demonstrated his repetitive and irrational behavior. Discuss the impact that punishment, nagging or anger might have on a child with OCD. What are some methods of limit-setting that would gain more effective results?
6. Terry's OCD symptoms increased during times of stress and anxiety and decreased when he could take his mind off his obsessive thoughts by acting as a character in the school play. What are some other ways a child might be temporarily relieved of his OCD symptoms?
7. Imagine a simple ritual you might do (avoiding every crack in the sidewalk, straightening and re-straightening your desk, counting the tiles on the ceiling). Now imagine feeling forced to continue this behavior for long periods of time because you fear that if you don't, something terrible will happen. Take a few minutes to visualize this behavior and the emotions that accompany it. Does this give you a different awareness for someone who has OCD?
8. Having become more aware of OCD, can you think of anyone in your life who may have this disorder? Have your thoughts or opinions about them changed as a result of watching this film?

