

HEALTH

mind matters



MINU BUDHIA

**Q:** I am a 20-year-old college student suffering from severe OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder). I've had it for five years and it's getting worse every day and affecting everything from religious matters to studies. I cannot concentrate on my studies and waste time thinking about it. When I try to ignore them I get anxious and start doing certain rituals. How can I stop this and focus on my studies?

BR

A: Dear BR, I hope you have been diagnosed with OCD by a professional. If not, please visit a psychologist for a psychometric assessment to confirm or refute the diagnosis.

I say this as sometimes severe anxiety may result in OCD-like symptoms and would need a completely different treatment plan. And if a psychologist has confirmed OCD, you must continue to visit him or her to chalk out a treatment and management plan. Cognitive

Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is what works best for such situations.

But you must understand a couple of things. You must accept that you have an invisible chronic illness and come to terms with the fact that it can be managed, but not cured.

The second is the nature of OCD. While compulsions (rituals) are something you can train yourself to control, obsessions are thoughts. The more you try not to think about the elephant in the room, the more you think of it. Obsessions primarily stem from fear and compulsions from the feeling that doing a particular action in a particular way will keep one safe. The first thing to do is dig deep and find the root cause of this fear.

Third, medication is an option, but it is not a quick fix. You would still need to combine it with therapy.

Finally, you have to understand that the treatment will take time. So, you'll have to be patient.

I can empathise with your situation. The need to complete 'specific rituals' can become a major



hindrance to our daily activities. Unfortunately, OCD is taken lightly and, mostly, incorrectly. So friends and family may not consider it a severe issue. But you must explain, at least to your family, your particular set of issues.

If you are not confident that you can, take them to your counselling session where your psychologist would be able to help. As it is affecting your studies, I suggest you speak to your professor to get their cooperation. I wish you all the best.

MD, Calcutta

**Q:** I am a 15-year-old girl and was in a relationship with a boy in my class for two years. I lost my sense of self for him, but wonder whether I am right in breaking up with him. It feels suffocating. I've lost interest in my studies. I am going to appear for my first board exams this year. I used to top my class, but from Class IX my scores have been falling. My teachers think I have lost my way and my friends are betraying me. I want to get high marks, but I can't think clearly. I have even thought of ending my life. I am afraid to tell my mom about this. I just want to do well in my studies as everyone has some expectations from me. Please help.

dealing with these intense emotions all on your own.

If you are feeling suicidal, please call a helpline immediately and find a counsellor. If speaking with your school counsellor is intimidating, connect with a psychological wellness facility to speak with a counsellor or a psychologist. Sometimes, all you need is an unbiased person to reveal all your anxieties to.

About the relationship issue, you're still quite young to be so heavily invested. Since you specifically mentioned feeling suffocated everywhere and are feeling like you have lost yourself, I will say this: If you feel you are facing emotional abuse, or are being gaslighted, please get help. Your grades slipping are a by-product of all the stress and anxiety you seem to be under, so first you need to take care of that. Your full concentration now should be on your emotional wellness. And those who have your best interests at heart, will support you irrespective of your academic achievements.

A: Dear MD, being a teenager is difficult. Throw in relationship problems, difficulties with studies and unsupportive friends, and you can feel overwhelmed and out of control. So, the first thing is to tell someone—an elder sibling or cousin, an aunt or uncle, or even a family friend. Although you're scared of telling your mother, it may actually help to share your feelings with her instead of



**Q:** I am an 18-year-old girl with my board exams coming up soon. I haven't even covered 10 per cent of my syllabus. I do not waste time on social media or with friends. I sit with my books but cannot study. From a topper in Class 10 I have even failed tests now. I don't understand why I cannot study. As I want to become a doctor, from Class XI I have tried to follow what toppers do — attended coaching institutes, skip social events and vacations and use social media only for studies. But nothing has worked. Now, my classmates, teachers,

friends and parents see me differently. I am very depressed and will be shattered if I don't score well. My self-confidence and self-esteem are at all-time lows. What should I do?

Anonymous, Calcutta

A: There are three things that stand out in your email. One, you're extremely stressed and much in need of a break. Two, you're seeking validation from friends, family, teachers in terms of academic

success. Three, you are a sincere student who in trying to follow the path of other toppers, has possibly lost her way.

First things first, take a deep breath. If you have been an exemplary student before, you can become one again, but, for that, you need to take care of

both your emotional and physical health. Locking yourself up with your books and giving up social life has taken a toll. Too much of a good thing is never good. So, it's time to do some smart work in addition to hard work. Turning into a recluse may not work for you. Moderation is key. Make a time-table that not

only includes subjects, chapters, and sections, but also includes short breaks, meal times, phone calls, hobbies, exercise, and a few social events. There's still time to turn things around.

Coming to your feelings of low self-esteem and self-confidence, you must understand that your friends and family care for you for who you are and not because you were a topper. They might be worried about the academic decline, but even more about you and how it's affecting you.

Now for the tough love part of my answer. Seeking validation is the root cause of being dissatisfied with yourself. In the end, we are all in charge of our own happiness and confidence. It is something that we find from within ourselves. You have to love and respect yourself enough to treat your mind, body and soul well. Expecting good things from yourself is important, but so is managing that expectation. I believe you will come through with flying colours in your exams.

