



Exercise for Teachers: Obsessions and Compulsions

Instructions: As you read the paragraph in the box below, tell yourself that you must count all the times the letter "e" occurs. But here's the catch: you have to count and read simultaneously -- you can't just read and then go back and count, and you can't keep track on a piece of paper. You have to do the counting in your head for this exercise. And to make it a bit more "realistic," accuracy will be very important to you -- if you lose track of the count or aren't 100% sure that you've counted correctly, you'll have to go back to the beginning of the paragraph and start again. Since you have OCD, you probably will doubt that you counted correctly at least once during the exercise.

OK, begin:

Children who have OCD often have hidden or silent compulsive rituals. These hidden rituals often confuse teachers who may look at a child and not realize what is going on internally that may make it almost impossible for the child to function normally at times. Young children often don't realize that what they are doing is "abnormal," and older children, teens, or adults are often embarrassed by their rituals and won't tell you about them.

OK, how'd you do on that one? If you were the student, how would you feel trying to read in school or at home? Might you get frustrated, tired, irritable? Might you give up?

Were you able to process anything of what you were reading? If you were the student and I was the teacher, and I called on you or tested you on what you had read, would you be able to tell me, or might I land up thinking you had a reading comprehension problem and/or that you were a very slow reader?

The severity of obsessive-compulsive symptoms waxes (worsens) and wanes (eases up). Children who have obsessive-compulsive features or symptoms as well as Tourette's Syndrome often experience more interference from the silent rituals or anxiety-producing thoughts than they do from the tics of Tourette's.

Feel free to share this awareness exercise with your colleagues. The more you know, the better for your students!