

# A lonely disorder

Image by Brad Fox with comments from Rob Willson

Brad Fox contacted *The Psychologist* with this photo he had taken. 'This image, for me, is a representation of the loneliness that my cousin feels – an effect of my Aunt's obsessive compulsive disorder and depression. I feel that their relationship has been deeply affected by this... even though they live together they are becoming a lot more lonely. They are in the middle of decorating her bedroom, which has taken a very long time to do, I would say at least 8–10 months. Her loneliness is characterised by a small chair that sits in the corner of her room.'

We contacted Rob Willson, co-author of *Overcoming Obsessive Compulsive Disorder*. He spoke with Brad about his situation, and then commented: 'This image is a stark representation of the impact that OCD can have on people's lives. Despite the immense sense of responsibility for preventing harm felt by those with OCD, it is not unusual to see aspects of the home neglected. This can happen as the individual's life becomes consumed with "safety strategies" such as avoidance and compulsions – washing, ordering, or checking. Trying too hard to be "sure" that harm has been prevented or to make things "feel right" becomes a vicious cycle and maintains the disorder.'

Rob said the psychological treatment of choice is cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT), typically with a strong emphasis on deliberate exposure and response prevention. 'It can be beneficial to help people with OCD to help the person re-appraise their inflated sense of responsibility and to normalise their intrusive thoughts, images, doubts or impulses.'

**I** Consent was obtained from all parties in this account. For further resources, see [www.ocdaction.org.uk](http://www.ocdaction.org.uk) and [www.ocduk.org](http://www.ocduk.org)

