

Ten Turtles on Tuesday

A Story
for Children
About
Obsessive-
Compulsive
Disorder



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illustrated by Sue Cornelison

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Contents

Dear Reader	6
Chapter 1: Sarah	9
Chapter 2: WildWorld	13
Chapter 3: Counting	19
Chapter 4: Fidgety Fish	23
Chapter 5: What If... ..	27
Chapter 6: The King	31
Chapter 7: What's OCD?	37
Chapter 8: The Good Detective	41
Chapter 9: The OCD Game	47
Chapter 10: Pretzels or Potato Chips	53
Chapter 11: Wearing out Its Welcome.....	57
Chapter 12: Resisting the Urge	63
Chapter 13: In the Driver's Seat	67
Note to Readers.....	72
About the Author and Illustrator	80

Dear Reader

Do you ever feel like you have to do something over and over? Maybe you count. Maybe you wash your hands, or check to make sure something is right. Maybe you clean, or perform certain actions with your body, or ask for reassurances. Maybe you do a combination of these things, or something completely different.

In *Ten Turtles on Tuesday*, you'll meet a girl named Sarah. Sarah feels like she has to count over and over or something bad might happen, like her mom might die. That's a heavy burden to carry! She counts things in order to feel better, but it never works for very long, and it only ends up making her feel worse.

Sarah has obsessive-compulsive disorder, or OCD for short. Lots of people have OCD. If you're one of them, you can do something about it.

Obsessions are upsetting thoughts that come back again and again. They come from our fears and make us feel an exaggerated sense of danger. Sarah worries that something bad might happen to her mom. Obsessions are usually about something bad happening to ourselves or someone we love.

Compulsions are something we do over and over to feel protected, like how Sarah opens and closes her closet door a certain number of times. Compulsions are actually a clever way to feel better at first, until we do them too much. The urge to do them is very strong. The truth is, most people repeat certain behaviors from time to time, but when it interferes with your life and upsets you, it's time to do something about it.

By giving in to your urges, you're giving your obsessions and compulsions more credit than they deserve. That makes them stronger. If you think of your obsession as a weed in your garden, then your compulsion is the water that feeds it, making it grow. You can choose to give in to an urge, or wait until it goes away.

It will take courage for you to wait until it goes away. At first, you'll feel anxiety, maybe a whole lot of anxiety. Your heart might pound. You might shake. You might get sweaty. You might get angry and irritable. But if you just feel the feelings without doing anything about them, they will go away all by themselves—just like waves in the ocean rising and crashing on the beach. Before you know it, it will get easier to resist your urges.

Some people wonder if OCD is the same as worrying. It's not. Worries—such as “What if I'm not good enough to make the team?” or “What if I don't have anyone to sit with at lunch?”—come and go. With OCD, the same upsetting thoughts come back over and over.

You might be wondering how I know about this. When I was a young girl I struggled with OCD. I remember one day making the decision to stop giving in to my urges. I said, “Enough is enough!” and I got out of the OCD game. Every now and then the urges came back. It was hard, but I knew that if I ignored them, they would go away again. Sure enough, they did!

Are you ready to be free from OCD? You can do it. I'm rooting for you.

Your friend,
Ellen



CHAPTER ONE

Sarah

Dear Diary,

We're getting close to WildWorld. We just passed the old gas station on the right and the little store with the red and green roof. I counted the whole way—5 of us, 5 taps on my leg, 2 kids playing in a sprinkler, 6 cars on the side of the road. Seems like I count more than ever. I can't help it. Nobody else in the car counts stuff—I can tell. They sing songs and think about whatever they want. When Mom taps the steering wheel it's for fun, to the beat of the song, not because she has to. I wish I could be like that, so carefree.

Sometimes I ask Mom if she notices how many houses are on the block, or how many people are on the sidewalk, but she never does. So I count secretly to myself...because I know it's **Weird**.



“Let’s go, Sarah!” Mom called again, a little louder this time. We were running late because of me, as usual. “I’ll be there in a minute!” I called back. I didn’t want to keep her waiting, but I had to be sure my closet door was shut *just right*. So I opened it again and closed it, opened it again and closed it again.

My cat, Lucky, sat at my window watching blue jays gather around the birdfeeder. Crickets chirped from the grass. Yellow tulips bloomed in the garden. It was a warm spring day with no school, and we were headed to an amusement park, WildWorld, with my best friend Kaelyn, my little brother Tommy, and his friend.

“Just two more times,” I whispered to myself as I opened the closet door again, then closed it again, opened it again, and closed it again.

Kaelyn and I met seven years ago when her family moved all the way from Chicago into the house across the street. We were only five, but it feels like yesterday: sitting on the driveway with my dad, watching the movers unload their things—a kitchen table, sofa, suitcases, bikes—a steady stream that seemed to go on and on forever. I hoped a new friend was moving in, a girl my age. Then Kaelyn and her mom walked over with a brown and white puppy.

“WOOF!” the puppy barked, his little tail wagging back and forth quickly as if waving hello.

“This is Sporty,” Kaelyn said. “He won’t hurt

you.” Sporty licked my cheek. I liked my new friends right away.

“Sarah!” Mom called again. She was losing patience.

Then my little brother Tommy called, “COME ON, SARAH!!” He ran up the stairs and banged on my bedroom door. They were in a hurry to get to the park. I was too. The pressure was building, like a balloon about to pop. And it was my fault. But it was worse when they interrupted me, because then I had to start over.

“Almost ready!” I called, as I opened the closet door again and closed it, then opened it again.

I heard my mom calling Kaelyn’s mom. “I’m sorry, we’re running late. We shouldn’t be too much longer.” I felt ashamed for making them wait. *Why was I doing this?* And why was it happening more and more?

“Coming!” I yelled, closing the door for the last time. It finally felt right. I was free! What a relief. I rushed to put on my sneakers and grabbed my bag. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Mom with her arms crossed. She looked mad. I didn’t like to upset her. One time I heard about a man that was so mad he had a heart attack and died right on the spot. I didn’t want that to happen to Mom.

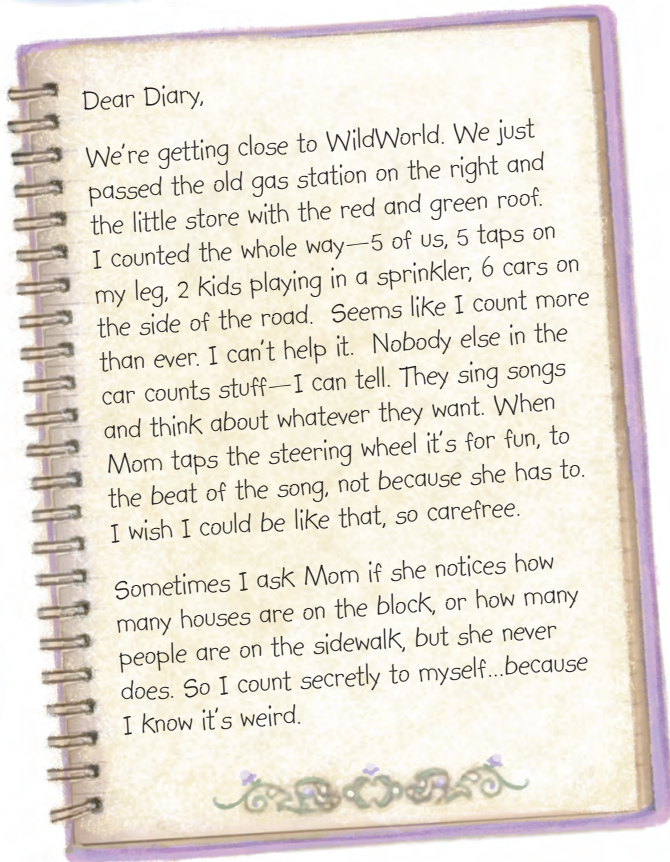
“Sorry, Mom, I was cleaning my room.” I knew it was a lie, but if I told her what I was really doing, she’d be even madder. Wouldn’t she?

Ten Turtles on Tuesday

Juvenile
Fiction/OCD
Ages 8-13



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Met Sarah. Sarah feels compelled to count. She has obsessive-compulsive disorder, or OCD for short. But with the help of her family and her therapist, Sarah learns how to handle her fears and take charge of her OCD.

A **Note to Readers** by Michael Tompkins, PhD, offers readers kid-friendly information, advice, and proven strategies to turn OCD on its head.

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