

# Living With OCD: The Lifelong Battle for Control Over the Disorder

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GUEST COLUMN By ELIZABETH MCINGVALE-CEGELSKI via [20/20](#)

*Elizabeth McIngvale-Cegelski, Ph.D., LMSW, was diagnosed with obsessive compulsive disorder as a child. In an effort to help those living with OCD and other illnesses, McIngvale-Cegelski made it her life's mission to ensure they receive treatment and to decrease the stigma that she said is associated with mental illness. Now 27, McIngvale-Cegelski received her Ph.D. in social work from University of Houston last week. She recently shared her daily battle with OCD with ABC News' "20/20."*

Aren't your teenage years supposed to be carefree and fun? Little did I know that would be the furthest from the truth for me.

By age 13 I was lost, scared and alone living with a crippling anxiety disorder what I soon would find out was obsessive compulsive disorder, also known as OCD.



*Photo: Elizabeth McIngvale-Cegelski, who was treated for OCD throughout her life since being diagnosed with the disorder as a child, married her husband in January 2013.*

I was taunted by intrusive thoughts that never seemed to end unless I ritualized — doing task over and over and over for hours at a time. Basic things like washing my hair had to be repeated until I thought it was done correctly. I would scrub my hands until the skin was raw. One round was never enough. The frustration was overwhelming. I would get so mad that I would punch holes in my bedroom wall. The disorder took over my life, my freedom and my happiness.

My family and I searched for help but couldn't find it. In fact we were told my case was too severe to be treated. As you can imagine this only left me feeling more frustrated and hopeless.

However, help was available and I was able to receive the treatment that I needed in order to regain control over my life that had been stripped away by OCD.

Exposure with response prevention (ERP) is the treatment that forever changed my life, teaching me how to effectively fight my OCD. When engaging in ERP you complete exposures (such as touching a doorknob) and then engage in ritual prevention (no hand wash), working your way gradually from your least challenging exposures to your most challenging exposures until you have control over your OCD.

My battle wasn't easy and isn't over. I still battle my OCD on a daily basis but I learned the tools needed in order to successfully manage my illness and the life that I deserve to live. Treatment for OCD is available and it can get better.



*Photo:  
McIngvale-  
Cegelski, with  
her husband,  
Michael Cegelski  
in January,  
2013.*

Besides treatment I feel the second most important thing you can do for yourself is to connect with someone else living with OCD. Meeting someone else who understands what you are going through can help erase those feelings of loneliness

that are often associated with a mental illness. It can help you know that you are not alone and there are others who have or are struggling as well. After treatment, I quickly decided that I would start telling my story in the hopes that it might help one other person living with OCD or any mental illness. I found this to be one of the greatest therapies for me. It helped me understand that I didn't have to live in silence and hide my struggles. I decided to share my story with others and the world in an attempt to decrease the stigma associated with mental illness and OCD. This catapulted me into my current career, it helped me see first-hand that this is my passion and find a way to turn my battle into a way to help and impact others living with this illness and other illnesses. I have recently graduated with my Ph.D. in social work and will continue to make it my life's mission to keep doing the work that I do until all with OCD can receive the treatment they deserve and until the stigma associated with mental illness no longer exists. Remember that you don't have to suffer in silence, it can get better and both help and support are available.