

College Confidential

OCD EDITION

Diverse Perspectives on Transitioning to College with OCD

Presented by Rachel Davis M.D., Tori Green, Cassie Marzke, Ron Marzke Ph.D.



Tori Green

Age: 20

School: Rutgers University

Year in School: Rising Sophomore

School Type: Large/Public

Living Situation: Single Room/Roommate

Accommodations: extended time on exams, single room, reduced course load

Main Fears: courseload/getting good grades, social life

OCD: Just Right, Contamination, Magical Thinking, Perfectionism, Moral Scrupulosity, Harm, Intrusive Thoughts, Checking, Symmetry



Cassie Marzke

Age/Year: 19/rising 2nd year

School: UC Berkeley

School Type: Large, public

Living situation: Single room in dorm

Accommodations: Extensions on assignments, different test dates, excused absences, ability to record class using Sonoscent, reduced course load as an option

Biggest fears going into college: Being away from home, possibility of having a roommate, OCD fear of change

OCD: moral scrupulosity, harm/suicide obsessions, intrusive thoughts, emetophobia



Ronald Marzke

Parent of a college sophomore who is living with OCD

Associate Dean, College of Science and Engineering
Professor, Department of Physics & Astronomy San
Francisco State University

20 years of experience working with student
accommodations through campus Disability Program and
Resource Center



Rachel Davis

Age: older than Cassie and Tori

School: University of Colorado Boulder, CU School of Medicine

Job: Psychiatrist at Health Professional Campus/OCD Program

School Type: Large/Public

Living Situation (undergrad): - roommate x 2 years, then single room

Accommodations: none - OCD not diagnosed/treated

Main Fears Going into College: being away from home, grades, religious and moral scrupulosity, not fitting in

OCD: Religious → Moral and religious Scrupulosity, Perfectionism, Health Anxiety, Emetophobia, Social Anxiety (including fear of being inappropriate/weird/gross)

Transitioning to College

- Have a goal: Why are you going to college?
- Plan but limit trips home
- Keep something consistent
 - Netflix show, game, book, online community
- Look into mental health resources before college starts
 - Bring medical records to new provider
- Enroll with Disability Services as soon as possible
 - Even if you don't need accommodations





Roommate Situation

Pros

Cons

Communicate with
RA



Content of Obsessions

Obsessions may be triggered or come up for the first time in the new context of college, for example:

- Scrupulosity
- Sex
- Contamination
- Appearance
- Relationships
- Failure and Perfectionism
- Just Right



Finding Support

- Friends
- Family
 - Discuss Plan to limit reassurance
- Therapist
- Clubs or organizations with a mental health focus
 - Active Minds
 - NAMI
- Online support groups
- IOCDF support groups
- University Mental Health Center



Maintaining (or Starting) a Healthy Lifestyle

Balance!!

Adequate Sleep

Diet

Down time

Effective coping skills

Exposures! (next slide)



Incorporating ERP

Living an ERP Lifestyle



What to do if OCD Gets Worse

Have a management plan in place

- ✓ Warning Signs
- ✓ What to do

Watch for all or nothing thinking and be prepared to challenge it

Instead of, *"I can't do this. I have to quit,"* think...

- Less than perfect is OK
- One bad semester won't ruin my life
...or maybe it will, and I'll deal!
- I can take fewer credits
- I can take a very difficult class at a community college
- I can take a medical leave of absence

How does OCD interfere with academic life?

Personal experiences and tips

A few ways that OCD interferes with studying and learning

- Getting stuck on details/missing the big picture
- Preoccupation with obsessions and rituals
- Problems with set-shifting
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Re-reading and re-writing
- Perfectionism



Getting Unstuck from the Details

1

Study with
other
students

2

Meet with
professors or
tutors

3

Start with an
outline vs. write
everything and
cut back

4

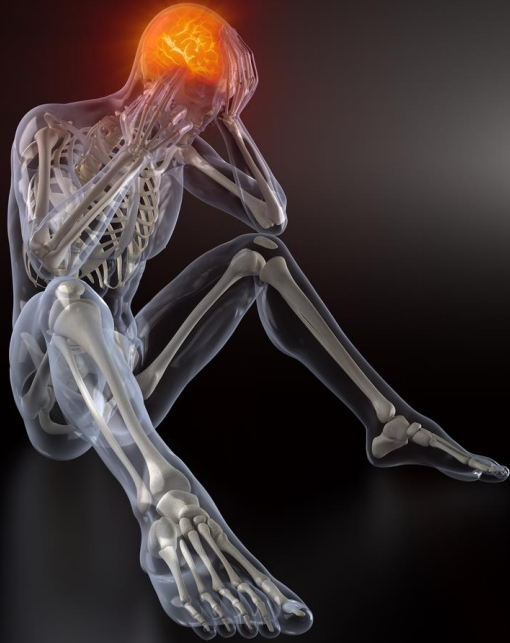
Turn in drafts
for feedback

5

ERP with
therapist

6

For ungraded
homework, do
what helps and
not what doesn't



Perfectionism (and Procrastination)

- Procrastination = avoidance = ineffective coping
- Doing it Perfectly = avoidance = ineffective coping
- Effective coping:
 - ERP re: “OK” work
 - Ask to see examples of “acceptable”
 - Work with classmates
 - Meetings with TAs or professors

Preoccupation with obsessions and rituals

Studying alone in your room may not work so well

Try different study environments.

Listen to music

Listen to motivational scripts

Take a break, do exposure (or something relaxing), come back

Use a treadmill desk



Feeling overwhelmed

● Ways to take a step back:

- Have set times for work and play - e.g. take a full day off per week
- Get outside
- Exercise
- Sign up for something fun
- Engage in productive leisure - Something that occupies your mind (rock climbing,...)
- Keep regular sleep schedule
- Practice mindfulness
- Self-compassion!!!

Breaking Up Work

The Five Minute Rule

Take *scheduled* breaks

Reward yourself for
small accomplishments



Set-shifting

Study different topics in different areas

Study individual topics in larger blocks of time

Don't schedule back to back classes

Work on projects in larger blocks of time

Take scheduled breaks

Re-reading
and re-writing



Use audio books



Use dictation program





Time management

- Walk to class with a friend to be accountable
- Use alarms and schedule on phone
- Schedule meetings with professors/TA's to decrease risk of procrastination

University Accommodations

Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA)

- Applies to all public and private schools
- Not to schools run by religious entities

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

- Applies if a school receives federal financial assistance
 - Including schools run by religious entities

Americans With Disabilities Act

Prohibits discrimination
against individuals with
disabilities in public places
including schools/colleges

OCD is covered under the
ADA

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States, as defined in section 7(20), shall, solely by reason of his or her disability, be excluded from the participating in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance...

K-12 vs. College

- K-12: Schools must identify students with disabilities and develop/implement an IEP
- College: Student must self-identify and provide documentation that supports the diagnosis of a disability
 - Must request reasonable accommodations
 - Not required to disclose disability, but if you don't college not required to provide reasonable accommodations
 - i.e. disclose sooner rather than later
 - Nobody should tell professors what your disability is

Documentation Guidelines

For Psychiatric/Psychological Disabilities

<https://www.ahead.org/affiliates/connecticut/documentation>



Licensed Mental Health Professional

- Impartial individual (not a family member)
 - Licensed clinical social worker
 - Licensed professional counselor
 - Psychologist
 - Psychiatrist
 - Neurologist



Clear Statement of the Disability

- DSM-IV or 5 diagnosis
- Summary of presenting symptoms



Current impact on the student's functioning

- OCD interferes with school in these ways:
- Impact or limitations in other major life activities
- Degree of impact: mild, moderate, severe



Assessment procedures and evaluation instruments

- Clinical interview
- Rating scales
- Psychological testing
 - Include standardized or percentile scores



Treatment information

- Impact of medications
 - Improvements
 - Side effects
- Impact of therapy
- Adherence to recommended treatment



Purpose of Reasonable Accommodations

- ✓ To provide equal access for otherwise-qualified students to instruction, materials, and evaluation
- ✓ To minimize the impact of a disability on a student's academic performance



Can a College Refuse Your Request? – Yes if...

1. Undue financial or administrative burden
2. Significantly changes the nature of the academic program
 - Unfair advantage
 - Lowers the standards
3. Personal nature
 - E.g. personal devices or personal attendant

“Unreasonable” Accommodations



Not taking exams



Not required to do the same
amount of work



Not attending class when it
is mandatory or missing a
significant amount of class



Reasonable Accommodations



**Not everyone with
OCD will need
accommodations.**



**You are not
restricted to the list
of “typical
accommodations**



**Work with your
psychiatrist or
therapist to
determine
effective, recovery-
oriented
accommodations**

Some accommodations
may exacerbate OCD

Symptom-enabling
accommodations should
be very time-limited

Examples of Reasonable Accommodations

Room alone

Emotional support animal

Service animal

Testing alone in a quiet environment

Extended time on exams

Use of writing centers

Tutors

Breaking up one due date into smaller deadlines/projects

Time off/missing class for therapy or doctor's appointments

Regularly scheduled meetings with professors

Examples of Reasonable Accommodations

Lectures recorded

Copy of the lecture slides

Early registration to secure classes at a certain time of day

Oral exams instead of written exams

Use of audiobooks instead of textbooks

Provide examples of “normal/good” work product (e.g. papers)

Allowed to live off campus in order to cook own meals

Allowed to step out of lecture for brief breaks

Staying near campus instead of away rotations

Day shifts instead of night shifts (if available to other students)

Potentially
“Unhealthy”
Accommodations

Allowed to leave class to wash hands

Extended deadlines

Allowed to be late on a regular basis

Others???

Temporary or Rare accommodations



One-time extension on deadline



Occasionally postponing an exam

Must be proactive



One on one discussions instead of class participation



Private feedback instead of in the lecture hall



Complete project on own instead of in a group



Own set of supplies or equipment (e.g. in lab)



Partial credit for late work



Allowed to enter the lecture hall late

A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a grey sweater, is shown from the chest up. She has a thoughtful expression, with her right hand resting on her chin and her gaze directed upwards and to the right. The background is a dark green chalkboard. In the upper left corner, there is a white circular bubble with a double-line border containing the text "Questions?". From this bubble, several white, hand-drawn arrows of varying lengths and directions radiate outwards across the chalkboard, some looping back towards the bubble. The overall scene suggests a state of deep thought or a search for answers.

Questions?