



WORLD OF FEAR

ALEX CHAPPELL '24 SHINES LIGHT ON LIFE
WITH OBSESSIVE-COMPULSIVE DISORDER

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**One
in 200
people
suffer
from
OCD.
Half of
those
affected
are
children
or teens.**

Just stop thinking about it.
“I kinda can’t, I’m so sorry. I wish
I could, thank you so much,” Alex
Chappell ‘24 said.

Chappell was diagnosed with obsessive-
compulsive disorder (OCD) in 2023.

However, it’s nothing new to him. He’s
struggled with OCD since elementary
school.

Chappell has obsessions and compulsions,
but OCD isn’t that straightforward.

“I know that for myself and a lot of other
people, it is kind of in that mindset where
it’s like, ‘Oh, I have to do this,’” Chappell
said. “Otherwise, someone is gonna hurt
your family, or you’re gonna hurt your
family or other people. It’s just always that
horrible thought process that people don’t
understand.”

Compulsions and obsessions are extremely
personal, usually targeting subconscious
insecurities and heightened anxiety.
They take over the person’s thought
process, practically hijacking them until
they complete the compulsion. Without
completion, further distress continues.

“It’s not just a simple ‘Oh, this thought
came into my mind.’ It’s more like, ‘This
thought keeps coming into my mind and
I feel like I can’t do anything about it,’”
Chappell said. “Except for your compulsions,
of course. It feels like that’s the only option.”

This is typical for those who suffer from
OCD.

OCD is a type of anxiety disorder. In
order to be diagnosed, you have to have
both obsessions and compulsions that take
up at least an hour of your day, according
to Psychology teacher Lindsey Olson.
Obsessions are classified as persistent
thoughts, impulses, or images that cause the
person distress, anxiety, fear, or disgust.

“In order to alleviate the anxiety associated
with those obsessive thoughts, they perform
what are called compulsions, which are
often repetitive behaviors,” Olson said.
“The problem is that a lot of times, the
compulsions end up driving the obsessions
because as they do that repetitive behavior, it
alleviates anxiety for a little bit of time.”

What really drives the compulsions is
the intrusive thoughts that come along with
the daily obsessions faced by those with
OCD. The feeling that the world will
end, or the belief that your friends
and family will die if you don’t
do a specific thing are two
common examples.

The worst thing about intrusive thoughts
is the distress they cause. Intrusive thoughts
usually go against a person’s morals. Like
violence against loved ones, which is a
distressing concept on its own. Every time
a compulsion isn’t met, done properly, or
even randomly throughout the day, intrusive
thoughts like those can pop into your head.

“I teach that it’s kind of like a vicious cycle,
where people really need help getting their
mind and their brain out of that vicious
cycle,” Olson said. “You just come back and
it causes the cycle to keep going and keep
going.”

It is exhausting.

“It’s not just thoughts. It’s kind of like
a repeated bombardment of your ‘mental
fortress,’” Chappell said. “You have your
mind, you have what you believe, what you
want to do with your life, what you think.
And it’s just constantly being poked at, little
things chipping off as you get these thoughts
that repeatedly come after you. And then
you have to adjust, at least at the moment, to
do it.”

Again and again, OCD is stereotyped
exclusively as cleanliness, or as being
extremely neat. This further invalidates
people with the chronic disorder.

“People think that if you like things to be
neat and tidy, that means OCD,” Chappell
said. “They don’t understand how it would
actually be if you had OCD with cleanliness
or neatness. You think something terrible
is going to happen because the books
aren’t straight and the dishes aren’t clean,
or you haven’t vacuumed in a while. I’ve
experienced that firsthand, where I’ve
washed my hands way, way, way too
much. It’s terrible. Your skin feels
terrible.”

OCD doesn’t make you
line your pencils in
order, or color
inside the lines.
It takes
your

deepest insecurities and feeds you distressing imagery every time you don't listen to your obsessions.

"6th to 7th grade is when I had my biggest episode with OCD, and that one was related primarily to cleanliness. That's when I had the big washing hands thing," Chappell said. "I struggled with that for around 9 months actually, just one big idea. That's when my parents put me in with an OCD counselor. So that definitely helped, and meds help now."

Medication, therapy, and healthy coping mechanisms can all regulate the symptoms of OCD. It cannot be cured, but proper treatment can quiet the disorder.

"I'm on my first SSRI, Prozac, waiting for dosages to increase. And then I have behavioral therapy," Chappell said. "I had an OCD counselor back in middle school, but recently I started up with primarily behavioral therapy. My psychiatrist focuses on meds, so she can help with that. But my traditional therapist isn't primarily OCD."

Chappell has been doing better since his episode in middle school.

"It's been relatively consistent recently, more one or two mild thoughts per day," Chappell said. "But it can still be disruptive in some ways."

This is the reality for most people diagnosed with OCD. It's still part of their day-to-day life. It still takes up hours of their

time.

"I didn't want my friends to see, so I'd hide it whenever I was around them," Chappell said. "Being around them was a good and a bad thing because I could kind of ignore the thoughts. When I got away from them, I got hit really hard with the thoughts. Because you're bottling it all up. It's been good now, with meds, having people support me."

Receiving the support he needed helped change his life for the better.

"I think just finding stuff you enjoy helps. For me, a lot of my life has to do with band and music, and having something else I can do. And surrounding myself with people," Chappell said.

Chappell is working to overcome the most difficult parts of OCD. But as a society, he believes more people need to be aware of the reality of OCD, and of how hard it can be.

"It doesn't help to just tell people to wash their hands or not, or to just distract yourself, because it doesn't always work," Chappell said. "For some people, it might. I know that for me, when you have to suppress them, a lot of the time it can be good to get over some. But people need to stop telling people with OCD, 'Just don't do it, or just don't think about it.'"

We can all work harder as a community to recognize OCD as something serious.

"People need to stop assuming that they know what's going on in your head."

OCD misconceptions

OCD does not mean liking your desk neat

OCD does not mean being a control freak

OCD does not mean being organized

OCD does not mean staying clean

OCD does not mean washing your hands a lot

OCD means having distressing obsessions

OCD means fears that conflict your values and morals

OCD means thoughts occur at least one hour each day

OCD means triggered fight or flight reactions

OCD is exhausting and uncomfortable

obsessive-compulsive disorder

/ äb-'se-siv-kəm-'pəl-siv dis-ôr-dər /

Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) features a pattern of unwanted thoughts and fears known as obsessions. These obsessions lead you to do repetitive behaviors, also called compulsions. These obsessions and compulsions get in the way of daily activities and cause significant distress.

Ultimately, you feel driven to do compulsive acts to ease your stress. Even if you try to ignore or get rid of bothersome thoughts and urges, they keep coming back. This leads you to act based on ritual. This is the vicious cycle of OCD.