

OCD Treatment at Williams House at Lindner Center of HOPE

OCD Is Real and Treatable

A testimonial from a young man and his family about their journey with OCD.



When their son Colton was in preschool, Lynn and Todd started noticing that Colton's bedtime rituals were taking an hour or more to get him to the point where he could go to sleep. And though they enjoyed his hugs, they noticed that he needed a certain number to be able to move on to the next thing. At school, if Colton had written on a piece of paper... he absolutely had to keep it or make sure it was thrown away in a certain trash can.

Lynn and Todd could see their son's anxiety increasing as he grew, and along the way he developed more rituals and contamination concerns. Lynn and Todd recall doing a lot of research that led the family to Colton's eventual diagnosis of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD).

When you ask Colton, he states that he has had OCD since birth, but received his official diagnosis in sixth grade. Colton explained that he has fears related to using a brand of hand soap offered at his school, so he compulsively overused a hand sanitizer at school. Otherwise, he was spending a long time washing his hands with other brands of soap.

His providers explained, Colton feared crossing "good" (loved ones, good memories) with "bad" contamination (hand soap, a certain laundry detergent, hairspray) for fear of emotional contamination.

Colton, now 14, had been in therapy near his hometown in Eastern Ohio, but did not seem to be progressing in a positive way. In fact, when his mother had to have surgery, Colton's OCD consumed him to the point where his parents could not get him out the door to go to school. The situation at home was becoming very intense.

Colton recognized how bad it was, acknowledging that his handwashing was taking several hours to complete.

After searching the internet, Colton's family found Williams House at Lindner Center of HOPE, an adolescent residential program featuring comprehensive diagnostic assessment and individualized treatment. Williams House has a specialized track for adolescents suffering with OCD.

"In going to Lindner Center of HOPE, I met amazing people," said Colton. "Going in I had doubts, but the team made things a lot easier for me."

Lynn said for her and her husband, the team at Williams House made them finally feel validated.

"We weren't crazy. It was real. This is how the disorder goes," Lynn recalled thinking, once they met with the treatment team. At that point even some family members had said that Colton's behaviors were because he was spoiled, rather than symptoms of an illness.

"Colton's care team was awesome. Colton built great relationships with them and they made him feel comfortable and successful," Lynn said.

Lynn acknowledged that initially progress felt slow, but that was the process. Colton was introduced to Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP). As Colton described, "Basically you are introduced to something you don't like."

During exposures, treatment team members were coaching Colton to lean into the distress and learn to cope with it and tolerate it. The team worked with Colton to develop a treatment hierarchy and they worked through the hierarchy to achieve milestones.

Lynn said, "It was amazing the things he was accomplishing." Colton said "I made a lot of progress. Life is so much easier." He said, "I could use laundry detergent just fine, but I didn't like a certain brand. That was my first exposure. Now I use that brand all the time. One of the exposures was carrying around a stick of that brand of detergent."

Hairspray was another product that distressed Colton. Though he did not use it, his mother's use was an issue for him. "On the last day (at Williams House) I sprayed my hair with it"

"ERP is what you don't want to do, but it works. I didn't think I would ever have a life again. I am able to take care of my animals at home again. I even got a hamster and named her Wilma after Williams House."

Lynn said, "I see my friends' Facebook posts about their kids getting their driver's licenses and other accomplishments. I wanted to post about Colton holding a certain brand of laundry detergent. Our goals and hopes are so different."

Colton was a patient at Williams House for 8 weeks. In weeks 6 and 7 there were huge breakthroughs.

"We're just regular people and we pulled resources to get Colton the right help for as long as we could," Lynn said. "Todd and I saw huge gains in those last 2.5 weeks."

The family understands that there is still work to be done, but they have HOPE. "There's not a magical cure. It's a lot of work. It takes the right medication with the right therapy. You have to fit together the puzzle pieces to make it work."

"There was a time when Colton couldn't touch the handles around the house and now he goes freely through the house. His dad just gave him a hug and he could not hug him before. That was sweet."

Lynn offered to other families who may be struggling, "If things are feeling out of control . . . if it's taking over your life, you need to pursue the right help. When it is in control of you, you need to take action."

"Mental illness is something a lot of people face, but something people hold in. Treatment is a lot of hard work, but the results are rewarding. I love Lindner Center of HOPE and want to work there someday. Thank you for giving me my life back."

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