

Support Group for Partners, Friends & Relatives of People with Mental Health Issues:
Personal Testimonial from an RTP Professional

A few years ago I encountered an old acquaintance from college that I knew but not well; we had many common acquaintances and old friends. We struck-it-off, dated, fell in love and lust, and decided to be engaged. Everything seemed good, normal, and positive. As I got to know this person better, some things seemed odd and unusual regarding situation, money, and mindset. But these things seemed well-explained and I chalked it up to the person having had a tough time as a single-parent, etc. I pitched in time, effort, and money to help them get on their feet; we soon married.

But rather than things improving overall for my spouse and us, they seemed to never get better. One problem solved or misunderstanding was soon replaced by another, and the things that seemed odd in logic, communication, and mode-of-operation, etc., persisted. Joy, happiness, humor, and affection seemed to wain for both of us, especially for my spouse; I attributed it to years of hardship, etc.

As time progressed and things stayed “dysfunctional” I was forced to begin to search for answers and explanations for all this, and I started to look up applicable things like hoarding tendencies, controlling personality, obsessive-compulsive traits, etc. And then I found it: OCPD – obsessive-compulsive personality disorder... it unfortunately fit my spouse “to a T.” But the nature of this disorder ironically prevents a person from realizing that they have it. We sought marriage counseling but to no avail, and I inadvertently had rendered myself a spouse-enabler of OCPD. My spouse had the bliss of the disorder’s denial; I had the reality and extreme difficulty of an OCPD spouse. Not wanting to stay a martyr and not being able to convince my spouse to seek treatment, I eventually filed for divorce (also messy, difficult, and confusing).

I would have greatly benefited from the education, empathy, and advice that can come from a support group. Instead, I had to educate myself and use whatever logic and faith I had on my own to deal with a spouse with mental health issues. With a support group I might have learned much quicker that my spouse was not bad or evil but sick, that this person was honestly OK with their dysfunctional behavior, that I ironically was enabling them with my support, and that I could not fix it - only my spouse could.

Living around a serious personality disorder is probably similar to what it is like to be with an alcoholic; it can have serious detrimental effects on money, emotions, relationship, health, and general well-being for the enablers and close relatives subjected to it. And as with alcoholism and Al-Anon, support groups for friends and family of those with personality disorders or other mental health issues are badly needed. They can save your “life” and perhaps restore “life” in those you love and care about.

My hopes for any and all of you is that your faith, wherewithal, and this support group opportunity will help you and your loved-ones better manage your lives and whatever mental health disorder is impacting you. I helped provide the impetus for forming this group, and I wish I had been aware enough to have done so four years ago... perhaps my outcome could have been better.

-- By: A battered but surviving “veteran” of OCPD