



Rev. Dr. Katie O'Dunne
“Intersection of OCD & Faith” Presentation Summary
(March 19, 2026)

Quick recap

This meeting was a presentation by Rev. Dr. Katie O'Dunne on the intersection of faith and OCD, specifically focusing on scrupulosity. Katie shared her personal experience with OCD and explained how it manifests in religious and moral contexts across different faith traditions. She discussed how Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP) treatment can help individuals reconnect with their faith in a healthy way rather than opposing it. The presentation covered common obsessions related to religion and morality, the difference between faith-driven and OCD-driven behaviors, and how treatment can be approached as a spiritual practice. Katie addressed questions from attendees about medication, supporting loved ones with scrupulosity, and the effectiveness of ERP treatment across different religious traditions.

Summary

Faith-Based OCD Support Presentation

The meeting began with the host, Rocco Clericuzio, and Katie discussing the high number of registrants for the presentation (53), expressing hope for a good turnout despite the uncertainty of attendance. Rocco and Katie then prepared to start the presentation, with Rocco managing the technical aspects and Katie preparing to share her screen.

OCD Experience and Treatment Approaches

Katie shared her personal experience with OCD, discussing how it affected her from a young age and how she initially hid their symptoms due to shame. Despite being told not to seek treatment due to her career aspirations, Katie eventually sought help and found it transformative. She now focuses on the intersection of faith and OCD, working with clinicians to develop culturally responsive treatment approaches. Katie emphasized the importance of addressing OCD openly and the impact it can have on individuals' lives.

OCD and Religious Scrupulosity

Katie shared her personal journey with OCD, starting with her own experience of seeking treatment in secret and later using her story to help others. They described OCD as an "ice cream cone" with different flavors, including scrupulosity, which relates to religion and morality. Katie explained that scrupulosity is not a new phenomenon, citing historical religious figures who may have suffered from it, and emphasized that OCD targets the most significant aspects of a person's life. The presentation focused on religious scrupulosity, though Katie noted her own experience with various forms of OCD.

Religious OCD Patterns Across Traditions

Katie discussed common obsessions across various religious and spiritual traditions, highlighting how OCD can distort core beliefs and practices. They provided examples from Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Catholicism, Islam, and non-theistic beliefs, emphasizing how OCD holds



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individuals to unrealistic standards. Katie noted that OCD often conflicts with the flexibility and forgiveness inherent in many faith traditions, and shared personal anecdotes to illustrate this point.

OCD and Religious Observances Challenges

Katie discussed the challenges faced by individuals with OCD during religious observances, highlighting how OCD often exacerbates concerns around religious practices. She explained that while certain behaviors like prayer or confession can be beautiful, they become compulsive when driven by fear, guilt, or a need for perfection. Katie emphasized the importance of distinguishing between faith-driven actions and those motivated by OCD, suggesting that urgency or a compulsion to perform rituals immediately may indicate OCD.

OCD and Faith Treatment Discussion

Katie discussed the complexities of healthy faith and how OCD can mask it, particularly in cases of scrupulosity. She explained the difference between value-driven and compulsive religious practices, using examples to illustrate how both can exist within the same day. Katie emphasized that exposure and response prevention (ERP) treatment for OCD, including scrupulosity, is not about opposing faith but rather addressing OCD as a mental health issue. She reassured individuals that ERP can help reconnect with faith and emphasized that scrupulosity is an OCD issue, not a faith issue.

ERP Therapy and Spiritual Practices

Katie discussed how ERP (Exposure and Response Prevention) therapy can align with spiritual practices, emphasizing that it helps individuals reconnect with their faith in a healthier way. They highlighted that ERP involves making challenging choices to resist compulsions, which can be seen as a spiritual act of faith. Katie also shared insights from her research and clinical experience, noting that treatment for OCD often requires trusting the process and embracing uncertainty, which is similar to the principles of many faith traditions. Katie concluded by emphasizing the spiritual aspects of ERP, including trusting treatment providers and having faith in one's capacity for growth.

Faith-Based ERP Therapy Integration

Katie discussed the integration of faith and ERP (Exposure and Response Prevention) therapy across different religious traditions, highlighting the work of Rabbi Noah Tile, Caitlin Claggett-Woods, and Mubeena Mirza. She emphasized that ERP can be culturally responsive and aligned with one's faith, distinguishing between discomfort and disrespect in exposures. Katie also addressed the importance of understanding a client's spiritual practices and encouraged clinicians to ask about them, even if they are not specialists in religion. She concluded by discussing the Recovery Trinity, which involves faith in the divine, the treatment team, and oneself, and stressed the significance of self-trust in overcoming OCD.

Faith and OCD Support Strategies

Katie discussed the importance of support from family and faith leaders in managing scrupulosity, emphasizing the role of emotional support without engaging with the content of obsessions. She



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shared personal experiences with her partner, Ethan, who also has OCD, highlighting the value of sitting with difficult emotions rather than avoiding them. Katie introduced non-compulsive prayer forms, including an ACT-based version of the Serenity Prayer and a prayer for strength to engage in treatment, adaptable across traditions. She addressed common questions about ERP and faith, emphasizing that ERP does not oppose faith but supports reconnection with values, and that finding the best evidence-based treatment for OCD is more important than matching faith backgrounds with therapists.

OCD and Faith Discussion

Katie discussed the intersection of OCD and faith, emphasizing that treatment often leads individuals to a more authentic and meaningful faith rather than separating them from it. She addressed questions about the effectiveness of ERP and medication in treating OCD, highlighting that medication can sometimes provide the space needed to use ERP techniques effectively. Katie also provided resources for individuals and families dealing with OCD, including the Space Treatment program and upcoming lecture series on family support for OCD.