

May 2019

EAST

GRAND RAPIDS

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Living



MEET
**DR. EDDIE
O'CONNOR**

Photography by Nicole Siembar Photography



- Bear & Evee Zerfas
- Stunning Storage Solutions
- Stereotypes & The Single Story Line

family spotlight

By Teri Tesseri

MEET DR. EDDIE O'CONNOR

Dr. Eddie O'Connor knows a thing or two about perseverance. Having divorced about six years ago, Eddie experienced that in midlife, a life can begin all over again.

As a single dad of four children—Shea (17), twins Cian and McKenzie (16), and Tynan (13)—Eddie relishes the time he does get to spend with his kids. “Having my kids only every other week, and my fiancé, Katie, living in Chicago, has taught me to be present. When I am with my kids, I am with them. When Katie and I can be together, I am focused on her. This then extends to my work. Instead of thinking of work all the time, I try to focus on work when I am actually working. Keeping my head where my feet are has engaged me more with life in general,” explains Eddie.

Originally from the Bronx, Eddie grew up in an Irish household. His father immigrated from Kerry, Ireland, when he was 18. Eddie’s mother is first generation Irish-American. While attending school at Mount St. Michael Academy, he ran track with Sean Combs, aka Puff Daddy, P-Diddy. Eddie laughs, “He was a really fast sprinter. Sean turned out to be multi-talented I guess!”

After high school, Eddie attended Binghamton University and then the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago for his Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology with



New York City family Christmas trip



Engagement photo with Katie



Tynan loves to read



Mud Run with Cian and Katie



Shea played Safety for the EGRHS Varsity Football team



The twins, Cian and Kenzie

an emphasis in sport psychology and behavioral medicine. A fellowship in pain psychology at the Pain & Rehabilitation Clinic of Chicago followed.

Many accomplishments also followed for Eddie, but he was surprised to learn that what he is most proud of wasn't what he thought it would be.

"Several colleagues and I went rogue and went out on our own with a three-year project to create the first Sport Psychology Expo in Salt Lake City, Utah. Five of us met weekly and put in many hours for three years and it was a great success, giving sport psychology away to the community. But then when it was done, life just went on. It didn't have a big life-changing impact that I somehow felt like it would. Now we did a lot of good. We helped people and we impacted organizational change and we inspired, but it wasn't 'it.' There was a surprising let-down, actually."

The accomplishments that really define Eddie are centered around his perseverance. "I was baptized at Ada Bible Church in January 2018. After my divorce, I knew I needed to become a different person. I had held on too closely to cultural beliefs and practices for my worth and it was destructive to my life. My journey to discover grace lasted five years and I am so grateful to now have Jesus at the center of my life."

"I am also really proud of my ability to rebuild my life after my divorce. It was difficult. Very difficult. Change happened slowly and often painfully. But I didn't give up."

"I also took on a challenging project a number of years ago. I was invited by The Great Courses to create 'Psychology of Performance: How To Be Your Best in Life.' Not being a professor, I created this 24-lecture course from scratch. It was a fantastic process of growth as I researched the latest science and applied it to my own work. And with the help of The Great Courses team, we created a product I am very proud of and have been able to help many internationally."

Eddie's tenacious desire to help others achieve their goals and live their best life extends to his community of East Grand Rapids. "I love working with EGR High School athletes. So many of

them are high achievers, both in sport and in the classroom. And, to be honest, our tradition of excellence comes with a lot of pressure. So I will see athletes struggling with perfectionism, fearful when they make mistakes. Sometimes athletes come to me when they do well in practice, but don't perform up to their potential in competition. Teaching them the mental skills to focus under pressure is rewarding, but for many of them, they confuse winning with their worth. I can relate because that was my mid-life crisis. From early on, I used achievement in school and sports to be 'good enough' and so many of our kids do the same, confusing their results with their identity. No wonder they are under pressure when a loss or a mistake reflects who they are as people."

"So I find it particularly rewarding to help students realize that yes, the game is important. Yes, mistakes are bad and are to be avoided. Yes, winning matters. And, no, you are more than your sport and academic performance. These are things you do, not who you are."

"From that perspective, we have great success reducing the stress, improving focus and confidence, playing better and having fun in their sport again."

Some free resources that Eddie would like to share with your student-athletes include: "Mental Toughness in 60 Seconds" video series (over 160!) on YouTube (which can be accessed via www.DrEddieOConnor.com) with new videos posted on my social media channels @SportsDrEddie (Instagram/Twitter) and @DrEddieOConnor (Facebook/LinkedIn).



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