



## From the Director's Desk



Dear Reader,

If you are struggling with anxiety or OCD, how do you know what kind of therapist you need?

Let's start here. My team loves being anxiety specialists. An anxiety or OCD specialist is not someone who dabbles in treating anxiety. Most of us don't treat a little bit of everything. We are fanatical about being anxiety specialists. The name of our team is not accidental.

If you are being seen by an anxiety/OCD specialist, you are being treated by someone who is dedicated to the science of psychotherapy and anxiety disorders. If you or your child see me in treatment, I make it abundantly clear that I want you to "live with fear, not in fear," to be a "warrior, not a worrier." With the kids I treat, I find playful ways for them to learn the difference between scary safe and scary dangerous. 90-95% of storms, bugs, needles, clowns, sleepovers, tummy aches,

germs, social interactions, sharp objects, dogs, tv shows, etc. are scary safe, not dangerous. It's ok to be scared and the feelings we have when we are afraid are normal and appropriate. By the way, I use this same approach with older kids and adults as well.

An anxiety specialist recognizes that we all have fear, that fear is normal, that fear is protective, and that fear can even be productive. It's simply your body's natural chemical reactions to a perceived threat. When fear gets misinterpreted, when fear over-predicts danger, and when fear begins to make decisions for you, fear has turned into anxiety. That's where we come in.

Whether you see me or someone like me, whether you use self-help books, white knuckle it, watch videos, or take medication, the most effective approach to managing and getting ahead of your anxiety long-term is simple: face your fears (assuming that they are truly safe in nature).

What does this mean and how do you do it? Anxiety specialists do not promote techniques that teach you to just "stop worrying." This is not only ineffective, but can also be harmful. We teach you to 1) face it head on, step by step from easier to harder challenges (we call these exposures), 2) reduce safety behaviors or rituals from your coping tool box (they make the problem much worse), 3) to make new meaning about your ability to withstand distress and anxiety and 4) to take intentional actions that are aligned with healthy values and beliefs. Different anxiety specialists might use different phrases, but this is the secret formula (it's not so secret).

Ultimately, every anxiety specialist truly believes that the best treatment outcome is not the absence of symptoms but rather the acceptance of them. We don't help people seek certainty, we help them embrace uncertainty.

It's not easy, but it's the most effective, science-driven way to overcome everyday anxiety or debilitating OCD. This is what an

anxiety specialist is excited to teach you, your child, your husband, or whoever in your life is battling anxiety.

So, how do you know what kind of therapist you need? There is no perfect therapist out there. However, if you or someone you love is suffering from anxiety or OCD, you simply want an anxiety specialist, not someone who claims to treat 20 problem areas. You deserve the best care possible. You deserve treatment that is based in science. Don't expect anything less.

**Face your fears. Live with uncertainty. Take Control of your life.**

**Dr. Josh Spitalnick, Clinical Director**  
**Licensed Psychologist**  
**Board Certified in Behavioral and Cognitive Therapy**

I can always be reached at [drspitalnick@anxietyatl.com](mailto:drspitalnick@anxietyatl.com) if you have any questions, concerns, or positive news to share!

To learn more about finding an anxiety or OCD specialist, we offer a detailed analysis on our website. [Click here to read more!](#)

## Science Matters

### **Protecting our Children from Unhealthy Childhood Experiences**

by: Dr. Chris Noble

Staff Psychologist, Anxiety, OCD, and Trauma Specialist

April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month. Our team of anxiety, OCD and trauma specialists is trained and prepared to provide support, education, advocacy, and treatment for anyone struggling with the effects of abuse or neglect.

Many individuals experience stressful experiences across their lifespan, but traumatic experiences occurring during childhood play an integral role in future health, wellness, and social functioning. These traumatic experiences are also known as adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs. Untreated ACEs are linked to chronic health

problems, mental illness, and substance misuse in adulthood. ACEs can also negatively impact education and job opportunities. However, ACEs can be prevented.



The CDC-Kaiser Permanente Adverse Childhood Experiences

(ACE) Study is one of the largest investigations of childhood abuse and neglect, household challenges, and later-life health and well-being. The original ACE Study was conducted at Kaiser Permanente from 1995 to 1997 with two waves of data collection. The results of this first study were shocking in many ways...

- 65% reported one or more kinds of traumatic childhood experiences
- 40% reported having two or more kinds
- In less privileged groups, the numbers were even higher

Today, the ACEs study is ongoing, examining the frequency, severity and types of childhood trauma and their negative outcomes. Some examples of such experiences might include experiences of violence, abuse or neglect, witnessing violence in one's home or community, witnessing familial substance abuse, untreated mental health problems, or other types of familial instability or conflict.

Knowing the significance of adverse experiences begs the following question - What can parents do to buffer their children from the negative aftereffects of trauma and adversity? How can parents boost resiliency in their children? Here are a few encouraging findings:

- 1) **Secure and stable attachment relationships** in childhood, involving nurtured, consistent and stability relationships increase resiliency, better academic grades, more positive peer interactions, and an increased ability to cope with stress
- 2) Healthier parenting, including use of **clear communication** and **setting healthy boundaries** and expectations offers positive relational standards for children throughout life
- 3) **Consistency and predictability** of rules and expectations, communication and listening styles that are respectful and safe, and encouraging appropriate independence provide a framework for children to thrive as they develop
- 4) **Modeling effective coping** as parents offers healthy learning opportunities for children to cope more effectively on their own
- 5) Parents who **utilize social support circles and accessing mental**

**health services** to learn new strategies for dealing with stress and hardship raise children who are more likely to rely on help-seeking behavior and support themselves

If your child has experienced something traumatic or disruptive, being proactive in finding competent mental health support can immediately interrupt future problems from developing further. This is called ***intervention***.

Raising your children in a healthy environment, reducing parental conflict or infighting, modeling healthy coping skills, and keeping lines of communication open from caregiver to child can significantly reduce the myriad of negative effects of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). This is called ***prevention***.

To learn more about the ACEs studies, or to identify support or educational resources for a child in need, the following links are a great place to start.

[Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\) Facts from the CDC](#)  
[ACES Too High News Reports](#)  
[The Child Welfare Information Gateway](#)

## We See You

We believe that having discussions about inclusiveness, equity, and diversity makes us a stronger team and creates a work culture that is more validating and empowering for our staff, our clients, and the community we serve. Aligned with this value system, this section is dedicated to sharing important resources related to mental health disparities, clinical issues specific to diverse populations, and the impact of cultural issues in psychotherapy.

### **Supporting our Asian American Communities**

by: Dr. Josh Spitalnick

The recent murders of innocent Asian Americans here in Atlanta, just minutes away from our offices, and other attacks around the country reveal a disturbing pattern of increased violence against Asian Americans. The staff at Anxiety Specialists of Atlanta denounces

violence against any ethnic or racial group and we hope that our clinic continues to be a safe space for anyone especially those from marginalized, oppressed, or underrepresented populations.

From the March of 2020 through February 2021 (the COVID-19 era), 3,800 anti-Asian hate incidents were reported in the U.S., with women victimized in hate incidents at over 2x the rate of men according to a published report from *Stop AAPI Hate*. Within the context of overall rates of hate crimes in the U.S., we saw a 7% decrease in 2020, yet anti-Asian hate crimes skyrocketed by 149%, as reported by the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism ([factsheet](#)).

Asian Americans are one of the fastest growing minority groups in the U.S. According to the 2017 Census Bureau population estimate, there are 18.2 million Asian Americans living in the United States. Asian Americans account for 5.6 percent of the nation's population. As mental health stigma affects all ethnicities, cultures, and nationalities, Asian Americans may be more impacted than most. The [National Latino and Asian American Study](#) found that while 18% of the general U.S. population sought mental health services and resources, only 8.6% of Asian Americans did so. A related study found that white U.S. citizens take advantage of mental health services at 3x the rate of Asian Americans.

Documented increases of anti-Asian attacks in recent years and limited access to mental health resources are just some of the reasons we need for more advocacy, safe spaces, and mental health resources for Asian-Americans.

There are many organizations addressing these important factors to increase the accessibility and availability of mental health resources for Asian Americans and their allies.

### **Mental Health Resources**

The National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association (NAAPIMHA) has worked on initiatives including

creating a [database](#) of mental health and behavioral services in the U.S. for Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders.

[The Asian Mental Health Collective](#) aspires to make mental health easily available, approachable, and accessible to Asian communities worldwide. The Asian Mental Health Collective is also dedicated to making mental health services more accessible for the community, and has created [the Asian, Pacific Islander, and South Asian American \(APISAA\) Therapist Directory](#).

### **Advocacy Resources to address hate violence against Asian Americans**

The [Asian Pacific Policy & Planning Council](#) (A3PCON) is a coalition of community-based organizations that advocates for the rights and needs of the Asian and Pacific Islander American (APIA) Community in the greater Los Angeles area, with a particular focus on low income, immigrant, refugee and other disadvantaged sectors of the population.

[Stop AAPI Hate](#) reporting center is in response to the alarming escalation in xenophobia and bigotry resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, a coalition with the Asian Pacific Planning and Policy Council (A3PCON), Chinese for Affirmative Action (CAA), and the Asian American Studies Department of San Francisco State University. The center tracks and responds to incidents of hate, violence, harassment, discrimination, shunning, and child bullying against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the United States.

[Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Atlanta](#) is the first and only nonprofit legal advocacy organization dedicated to protecting the civil rights of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders (AANHPI) in Georgia and the Southeast.



## Staff News and Events

**In addition to our primary clinical roles, our team works hard to provide support, education, and advocacy to our colleagues, the communities we serve, and the scientific field of OCD, anxiety, and mental health. Below are many of the recent contributions by the staff at Anxiety Specialists of Atlanta.**

Dr. John Mohammadioun completed his Postdoctoral Fellowship with Anxiety Specialists of Atlanta, obtained licensure in the state of Georgia as a Psychologist, and joined our team officially as a Staff Psychologist.

Marti Munford, LPC completed our first group-based S.P.A.C.E. (Supportive Parenting for Anxious Childhood Emotions) cohort with parents from 6 families. The next one launches mid-April.

Jen Powell, LPC completed a 2-Day Intensive Training in Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT) presented by CPT co-developer Dr. Kathleen Chard (PESI).

Jen Powell, LPC completed a 4-Day LPC Supervision Workshop Series to become a Certified Professional Counselor Supervisor (CPCS) in GA, presented by Glenn Duncan, LPC (Advanced Counselor Training).

Jessica Kalin, our practice manager, has received her Certificate of Appointment as a Notary Public issued by the Cobb County Superior Court.

Dr. Josh Spitalnick presented at the ADAA's (Anxiety and Depression Association of America) annual conference (virtual), titled "Just Thinking: Helping Clients (and Therapists) Catch and Abandon Subtle Mental Rituals."

Dr. Josh Spitalnick presented at the Technology Association of Georgia (TAG) Virtual Event, titled "Improving Access to Behavioral Healthcare: A Discussion around Technology-Enabled Behavioral Health."

Dr. Josh Spitalnick co-authored a peer-reviewed article in the



Journal Behavior Therapy titled "Treating Childhood Social Anxiety Disorder with Virtual Environments and Serious Games: A Randomized Trial." To access this article, [Click here](#).

Rachel Warsett, LPC completed S.P.A.C.E. training led by Dr. Eli Leibowitz of Yale University.

Dr. Theresa Welles launched a new support group for moms of anxious children.

## Group Therapy Services

Our first support group for moms of anxious kids has started (led by Dr. Welles). We are thrilled to be providing these kinds of supportive services, bringing parents together and building a community of support for all of our parents.

In response to the success of the first S.P.A.C.E group we started earlier this year, Marti Munford, LAPC will be starting a new round of her amazing S.P.A.C.E. Skills Group for Parents/Caregivers. This group will start April 20th at noon and will take place every Tuesday for 6 straight weeks. Registration opens April 5th. If you have any questions about this group, you can always email Marti at [munford@anxietyatl.com](mailto:munford@anxietyatl.com).

Dr. Spitalnick will be starting 2 more Adult Skills and Support groups in June, one for OCD (June 8th @ 4pm) and one for Health Anxiety (June 15th @ 4pm). Registration will open in late April.

Check out our [EVENTS](#) section of our website for descriptions, full flyers, and registration details.



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