



ANXIETY SPECIALISTS  
— of ATLANTA —  
Evidence-based Psychological Services

## From the Director's Desk



Dear Readers,

It was wonderful to hear from so many of you after our first newsletter last month and the positive response was encouraging. I'd like to share with each of you the motivation behind our monthly newsletter: ***intentionality***, ***purpose***, and ***values***.

I have been practicing as a Cognitive-Behavioral specialist for over 20 years (that's a scary thought) but in pursuit of lifelong training and education, I have evolved my anxiety treatment skills, recently influenced by the teachings of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). To many, ACT is nothing more than a "friendlier" version of CBT, but inside the pages of its rich teachings are concepts that can be so powerful, especially for managing and treating anxiety and OCD, including intentionality, purpose, and values.

For the various treatment services my team provides, intentionality and

values-based actions are everything, especially given that anxiety disorders are infested with so many unwanted, hurtful thoughts and feelings. This explains why there is often shame, disgust, or embarrassment when anxiety/OCD symptoms arise. Therefore, acceptance of these unwanted and terrifying neurochemical assaults is critical in treatment, as is taking intentional actions rooted in positive values in a direction towards anxiety (yes, lean in!). By doing so, the anxiety victim becomes the anxiety victor by taking back control and creating a more positive pathway forward.

So, what does intentionality, purpose, and values have to do with this newsletter? The intention of this newsletter is to create a greater sense of community, connectivity, and inclusiveness with everyone we support. Each newsletter will highlight intentional and values-driven activities by our staff to connect with those we support. To start, we are being more vocal and intentional in our weekly team discussions, our recruitment practices, and our outward messaging when it comes to topics about privilege, racism, and diversity, including how these issues impact our clients and the services we provide them. Additionally, we are working hard to offer more accessible and affordable evidence-based services to the Atlanta community, starting with the addition of four new low-cost groups, hiring of additional staff, and team members increasing their community and online presence to provide more education, advocacy, and consultation resources to our community. Check out the News and Events tab on our website for more details. I look forward to seeing what other exciting ways our team supports these core values in 2021.

For those families or loved ones we treat, we thank you for putting your trust in us as part of your healthcare team. For those of you who rely on us for support, referrals, or advocacy, we thank you for trusting us to be a reliable, evidence-based professional ally.

And, as always...

**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**

Click to watch a recent Youtube Q&A with Dr. Spitalnick about OCD

# Science Matters

## **We need more treatment options for children with anxiety, WHY?!?!?**

Here is what we know about the science of pediatric anxiety reported by leading scientific organizations such as NAMI, NIMH, CDC, and ADAA:

- Anxiety is the most common mental health concern for children, with approximately 30% of children suffering from clinical levels of anxiety at some point in their childhood
- Anxiety disorders often co-occur with other disorders such as depression, eating disorders, and ADHD
- Anxiety disorders are treatable, yet only about one-third of those suffering receive treatment
- Untreated children with anxiety disorders are at higher risk to perform poorly in school, miss out on important social experiences, and engage in substance abuse

Thankfully, there is overwhelming research supporting CBT-based interventions for children with anxiety disorders and I'm proud that our clinical team provides these effective treatments for our pediatric clients and their families.

To address the gap for kids who do not have access to treatment or who refuse treatment, researchers at Yale Child Study Center developed an evidence-based treatment option directly for parents of anxious children, called SPACE (Supportive Parenting for Anxious Childhood Emotions).

Parents who participate in SPACE treatment will learn skills to help their child overcome anxiety, OCD or related problems. The two main changes that parents learn to make in SPACE treatment are 1) to respond more



supportively, confidently, and positively to their anxious child's difficult moments and 2) to reduce the accommodations they have been making to the



child symptoms.

[Click here](#) to learn more about SPACE, along with the research and resources behind it. You can also read through our staff bios and see under ***Education and Certifications*** who among our therapists is trained to offer SPACE-informed treatment for parents of anxious children.

## We See You

We believe that encouraging discussions of inclusion, equity, and diversity makes us a stronger team and that attention to sociocultural factors in the work environment makes our staff and professional culture more validating and empowering for all. Aligned with this value system, each month we will be sharing important resources related to mental health disparities among diverse populations in this section, "**We See You.**"

Health disparities statistics related to people of color and other underrepresented populations are discouraging and must be addressed. There are too many to cite, but a few that highlight many of the long-standing concerns reported in the literature include:

- Racial/ethnic, gender, and sexual minorities often suffer from poor mental health outcomes due to multiple factors including inaccessibility of high quality mental health care services, cultural stigma surrounding mental health care, discrimination, and overall lack of awareness about mental health (APA, 2021)
- Black Americans are 20% more likely to experience serious mental health problems than the general population (According to the Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health, 2018)

- Research has consistently shown lack of cultural competence in mental health care, which results in misdiagnosis and inadequate treatment (Journal of Child and Family Studies, 2016)

Fortunately, there are many resources specifically for professionals to increase one's own cultural competence as a therapist, as well as resources about racial justice, learning how to talk about racism, understanding racial trauma, and resources about how to engage in antiracist actions for all communities of color. This month, we start with identifying targeted resources for the Black community.

Among the many professional organizations our team is associated with (which you can see at the bottom of our homepage), the Anxiety Depression Association of America (ADAA) has put together a wealth of resources for professional audiences and the lay community addressing "*Mental Health Resources for the Black Community*," and we urge you to visit their site to learn as much as you can on these important topics, especially if you are a professional providing direct care. [Click here](#) for these resources.

With a specific focus on anxiety disorders, which are among the most commonly diagnosed mental health disorders in the United States, you might also consider reading the article, "*The Link Between Experiences of Racism and Stress and Anxiety for Black Americans: A Mindfulness and Acceptance-Based Coping Approach*." Here, you will learn about the association between experiences of racism and its effects on Black Americans and also learn about helpful coping strategies that may be beneficial for those who have experienced racism. [Click here](#) to read this excellent article.

If you are simply looking for guidance on the specific ways to be more anti-racist, The Greater Good Magazine published a wonderful article September 2020, about "*10 Keys to Everyday Anti-Racism*." This might inspire you to reconsider daily actions or at least spark important dialogue among friends or colleagues. [Click here](#) for this article.

Finally, as professionals, most of us have been to workshops and taken

classes to increase our own cultural competence throughout our careers. While this is important, questions remain whether this is enough to meet the needs of our clients who identify as racial/ethnic minorities or underrepresented populations. Renowned licensed psychologist and ordained minister Dr. Thema Bryant-Davis, who has worked nationally and globally to provide relief and empowerment to marginalized persons, offers some first steps in moving beyond cultural competence to consider becoming an antiracist practitioner. This short but inspirational video, sponsored by the National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine, can be a wonderful starting point for professionals looking to move beyond the basics of cultural competence. [Click here](#) to view the video.

## Clinician's Corner

If you or someone you know is struggling with a sense of loss, confusion, or an unyielding feeling that your "life is on pause" because of the many challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, we urge you to read a thoughtful and helpful article authored by [Jen Powell, LPC](#). Adored by all of her patients (and colleagues), Jen is simply one of the most thoughtful and compassionate trauma specialists we know. Her observations and guidance in this article are invaluable to us all.



[Click here](#) to read Jen Powell's informative and helpful article on our website, titled "*Life on Pause: Coping with the Trauma of a Pandemic*"

## New Group Therapy Offerings

We continue to offer our Adult OCD Support/Skills Groups but we are adding many new groups therapy options, including:

- Health Anxiety Support/Skills Groups (adults) (starts 2/9)
- S.P.A.C.E. Skills Group for Parents/Caregivers (starts 2/24)
- Teen Girl Empowerment Group (aged 14-16) (starts 2/25)
- Support Groups for Moms of Anxious Children (starts 2/17)
- ...and more to launch in March

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



## S.P.A.C.E. Skills Group For Parents

This group is designed to help parents and caregivers who are raising children with anxiety and OCD. This group is based on the parent-based protocol outlined by Yale University's empirically supported S.P.A.C.E program (Supportive Parenting for Anxious Childhood Emotions). Together, we will walk through the process of parenting the anxious child through recognition and reduction of parent accommodation as well as communicating confidence, validation, and support to your child.

# TEEN GIRL EMPOWERMENT GROUP

A PLACE TO TACKLE DIFFICULT  
TOPICS IN A SUPPORTIVE PEER  
ENVIRONMENT, WHILE LEARNING  
NEW SKILLS. TOPICS INCLUDE  
STRESS, BODY IMAGE,  
RELATIONSHIPS, AND MORE.

Thursdays at 6-7:30 PM  
February 25 - April 22, 2021





# HEALTH ANXIETY SUPPORT GROUP

FACILITATED BY DR. JOSH SPITALNICK AND LED BY GROUP ATTENDEES, PARTICIPANTS WILL REVISIT THE BASICS OF HEALTH ANXIETY ALONG WITH TECHNICAL STRATEGIES BEHIND EFFECTIVE EXPOSURE AND RESPONSE PREVENTION (ERP). MEMBERS WILL BE ABLE TO OFFER SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE TO GROUP PARTICIPANTS AS WELL AS RECEIVE ENCOURAGEMENT AND INSPIRATION FROM EACH OTHER. TOGETHER, OUR MUTUAL GOALS WILL BE TO:  
FACE FEARS ON A DAILY BASIS...LEARN TO BE OK NOT BEING OK...AND LEARN TO LIVE WITH UNCERTAINTY

Every Other Tuesday 4:00-5:30pm

Feb 9 - May 18 2021

## Staff Updates

As we continue to expand our team, train the next generation of anxiety and OCD specialists, and always strive to increase the availability and affordability of evidence-based services, we are very excited to announce the addition of our first Masters-level psychology intern.

**Sarah Gazaway, M.S.**, a graduate student in Georgia State's Counseling Psychology Program, joined our team in January 2021 and will train with us for the next 2 years. Sarah works with



adolescents and adults, utilizing Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT), and Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP) to treat anxiety spectrum disorders, including obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), generalized anxiety disorder, and panic disorder. Sarah's additional clinical interests focus on perfectionism, shame, perinatal/postpartum struggles, childhood trauma, and dissociation. Currently, she is designing a dissertation study to compare positive psychology treatments such as self-forgiveness and gratitude for individuals struggling with maladaptive perfectionism.

To learn more about Sarah's professional experiences and personal interests, check out her [profile](#) on our website.



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