



## From the Director's Desk



Dear Reader,

On March 30, 2020, two weeks into the nightmare of the pandemic, I authored an article questioning the capabilities and challenges of our healthcare system, titled "A Healthcare System Broken, but Don't Give Up Hope, Keep Dreaming" ([link to the full article is below](#)).

I shared hopeful wishes about institutional changes that are needed to fortify our healthcare system so we can best respond to the overwhelming medical and psychological impact of the pandemic. I expressed my concerns that if we didn't allow for healthcare workers to be more mobile and accessible, and practice across state lines, we would not be able to handle the needs of our country. I really hoped, at the time, I was wrong....so where are we now?

The pandemic around the world is far from over, but here in the United

States, it feels like the nightmare might soon be over, as frontline workers, medical providers, and vaccine producers have responded so marvelously to the charge.

Positive change is happening. We are seeing continued decline of COVID-19 hospitalizations week after week. Kids are getting vaccinated. Restaurants are fully opening up again. Families are starting to consider travel. Social gatherings are safely happening every day. Companies are starting to ask their employees to come back to the office (okay, that may not be a welcomed change). Dare I say some of us are conveniently forgetting how bad this nightmare has been?

In light of these many positive changes and new experiences, one thing that has not "gone back to normal"...the psychological needs of our communities, our loved ones, our colleagues, and ourselves. Therapy clinics around the country are receiving 2-3 times as many requests as they would typically have had before the pandemic and it does not appear to be slowing any time soon. There have been many explanations behind the increase in people seeking mental health care, including the negative impact of the pandemic, tv and sports personalities talking more publicly about mental health, and the explosion of online counselors. But why now? Why now is everyone seeking out a therapist or counselor?

I really don't know why, but my immediate reaction to the surge...IT'S ABOUT TIME! Though I'm not happy to see so much anxiety, sadness, or struggle, it's always been there. I'm inspired to see so many people prioritizing self-care. Historically, we don't. Americans notoriously underreport psychological symptoms, especially men. Stigma around mental health is still pervasive and harmful. Limited quality providers, fear, and the cost of treatment all serve as barriers to seeking effective care. Yet, there is so much hope and positivity on the horizon when people seek out support and treatment, when they actively address their emotional needs, when talking about mental health becomes more mainstream, and when mental health gets prioritized in our

communities and families.

Unfortunately, and not surprisingly, my professional community is not nearly as prepared or supported as is the medical community. We are not ready for the surge. It will take several years, maybe a decade, for there to be enough qualified clinicians around the country to meet the demand.

Although our clinic can only do our small part, I'm proud each day that we keep finding ways to evolve with demand and increase our availability to those in need. We just added two more outstanding therapists to our staff, we are increasing our treatment options, we are adding more online resources to our website and social media, we are offering additional lower cost groups, and we are finally launching FREE support groups (I have wanted this for several years). We are doing this while remaining true to our core mission of providing evidence-based, accessible, and affordable care for all anxiety, OCD, and related problem areas.

Even though the mental healthcare system in America needs to catch up to the medical system, and we need legislation that allows us to provide services across state lines safely, and we need reform when it comes to insurance coverage and reimbursement, this recent demand for psychological services will undeniably inspire innovation and creativity to address the need. For that, I won't "Give Up Hope" and I'll "Keep Dreaming."

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

**Dr. Josh Spitalnick, CEO/Practice Owner**

**Licensed Psychologist**

**Board Certified in Behavioral and Cognitive Psychology**

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 read Dr. Spitalnick's full article, A Healthcare System Broken, but "Don't Give Up Hope, Keep Dreaming" from March of 2020, click here**

# 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 two new therapists joining us this month.

**Alicia Porter, LPC, NCC** is a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) who specializes in treating various anxiety disorders, academic anxiety, depressive disorders, grief, childhood trauma,



and self-harming behaviors for all ages. Having practiced within the medical community for over 15 years, Alicia also has experience in counseling clients and their caregivers who are living with persistent and/or debilitating physical illnesses. Her techniques are rooted in a person centered approach and include Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), Mindfulness, and play therapy combined with other evidence based interventions.

To learn more about Alicia's professional background and personal interests, [click here](#).

**Adam Jaffe, MSW**, joins Anxiety Specialists of Atlanta after recently completing his Masters of Social Work. He is working towards becoming a Licensed MSW this summer and then will spend the next three years, under our clinical supervision, working towards becoming a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW). Adam specializes in Cognitive-Behavioral therapy and exposure



therapy for treating OCD and anxiety disorders, and he completed his internship in CBT at Skyland Trail in Atlanta. He also has experience working with Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, other mindfulness-based approaches and he has a unique area of interest in treating performance anxiety, given his background as a classically trained musician and piano teacher.

To learn more about Adam's professional background and personal interests, [click here](#).

**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.

## **Pride and Prejudice: The LGBTQ Youth Mental Health Epidemic**

by Dr. Chris Noble, Licensed Psychologist, LPC, CPCS  
Anxiety, OCD, and Trauma Specialist

***\*\*This article is an abbreviated version of the one posted on our website. See below to access the complete article\*\****

On June 28, 1969, police raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay club in Greenwich Village, NYC. This raid was not atypical, as sexual minority establishments were frequently targeted, but the reaction of bar

patrons, staff, and neighborhood residents set into motion six days of protests and clashes. The message was clear — citizens demanded establishment of places where LGBT+ people could go and be open about their sexual orientation without fear of arrest. The beginnings of Pride month were catalyzed, to celebrate LGBTQIQ+ rights and culture, to shine a light on issues faced by this community and to commemorate the lives of community members who have lost their lives to hate crimes, hate crime-related suicide and HIV/AIDS.



The issues faced by LGBTQ (also referred to as Sexual and Gender Minority, or SGM) individuals are particularly impactful to younger members of our communities. Studies suggest that LGBTQ youth are vulnerable to poor mental health at least in part because they must negotiate typical stressors of youth and adolescence alongside coming to terms with an SGM identity, which can include managing exposure to stigma-related stressors, bullying from peers and teachers, and most impactful, from within their own families. A recent study found that critical and unique risk factors for LGBT youth accounting for increased suicidality include discrimination, lack of family support and the discredited practice of conversion-based therapies. Bullying, feelings of hopelessness, and cultural and religious beliefs that are in opposition to SGM status are also predictive of negative mental health outcomes and completed suicide.

On May 19th, 2021, the Trevor Project released its annual National Survey on SGM youth Mental Health, which surveyed 35,000 people (aged 13-25). Findings from the 2021 survey emphasized a critical need for investment in mental health services and intersectional policy solutions to address the public health crisis of suicide amongst young people. Here are some of the concerning numbers:

- 42% of LGBTQ youth, seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year, with nearly half of these young people finding

treatment not accessible

- Among LGBTQ respondents, 12% of white youth attempted suicide compared to 31% of Native/Indigenous youth, 21% of Black youth, 21% of multiracial youth, 18% of Latinx youth, and 12% of Asian/Pacific Islander youth
- LGBTQ youth who experienced discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or race/ethnicity reported much higher rates of attempting suicide — and those who reported experiencing all three of these different types of discrimination reported the highest rate of attempting suicide.

With this concerning data in mind, it begs the question “What can we do to help these kids?” Fortunately, researchers have been hard at work focusing on specific areas and arenas where we can most effectively intervene to best support our SGM youth. The American Psychological Association states that, “Family connectedness, support from other adults, and school safety are all characteristics that are amenable to change and would be appropriate targets for interventions to protect young people from self-harm. Educating the parents and other influential adults to connect with and support adolescents grappling with issues of sexual identity may be a critical component of mental health promotion and protection for these young people.” Let’s break this down!

### **Parental Acceptance:**

LGBTQ youth whose family highly rejected their sexual orientation are 8.4 times more likely to have attempted suicide compared to their LGBTQ peers that experience no or low levels of family rejection. Respecting transgender and nonbinary youth’s pronouns and allowing them to change their name/gender marker on forms and documents when possible are also associated with lower rates of suicide.

### **Coming Out:**

The term “coming out” has become so mainstream that many people assume that the word—and the actions it entails—are simple, but it can be an emotional process for all involved, and the reality is that parents may need coaching or therapy on how to best support their

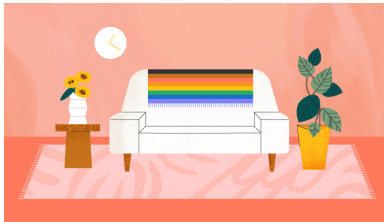
SGM child. Organizations such as PFLAG (Parents, Families and Loved Ones of Lesbians and Gays) provide numerous resources including support groups for young people and family members, parent trainings, webinars and live events. Local and National Chapters are here to provide support.

### **Adults are key!:**

A recent study found that four protective factors (family connectedness, teacher caring, other adult caring, and school safety) were predictive of better functioning, lower levels of suicidality and lower levels of mental health symptoms. LGBT-affirming spaces and transgender-inclusive policies and practices are consistently associated with lower rates of attempting suicide. Positive, affirming and validating reactions from the adults in these young people's lives, as well as respectful school climates are essential to SGM youth mental health.

### **Supporting Safe and Effective Treatment:**

Parental awareness of the dangers of conversion therapy, which has been deemed as “both ineffective and harmful to the well-being of LGBT individuals,” are essential to better therapeutic outcomes. As



parents, familiarize yourself with best practices for LGBT-affirming therapy. The American Psychological Association states that “appropriate application of affirmative therapeutic interventions... involves therapist

acceptance, support and understanding of clients and the facilitation of clients' active coping, social support and identity exploration and development, without imposing a specific sexual orientation identity outcome (i.e., conversion therapy).

Anxiety Specialists of Atlanta is an LGBTQ+ affirming and gender affirming clinic committed to providing an inclusive environment for all.

Happy Pride Month!

Helpful Resources:

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/>

<https://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/guidelines>

<https://www.pflag.org>

<https://sojourngsd.org/>

<https://www.atlantapride.org/>

<https://lnfy.org/>

[Click here to read the full article by Dr. Chris Noble](#)

## Group Therapy and Free Support Groups

Our **Parenting Support and Skills Group: Managing Conflict at Home**, led by Dr. Cameron Mosley, begins June 16, 2021, and registration will be closing next week. Dr. Mosley is certified in Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT), a behavioral treatment for caregivers of children displaying problem behaviors.

This course is designed to help caregivers modify their children's problematic behaviors, such as tantrums, lying, and not following directions. Caregivers will learn to confidently manage behaviors while maintaining a positive relationship with their child.



[CLICK HERE to get full details and Register](#)

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Starting this month, we will be launching a **FREE Divorce and Separation Support Group**. This group will run monthly, it will take place securely over Zoom, and it will be the first of many **no cost** services our team is excited to offer to our community.

This support group will provide a community of support and healing to help individuals move through the difficult process of ending and grieving a significant partner relationship. This group will be co-led by two of our Licensed Psychologists, Dr. Theresa Welles and Dr. Chris Noble. It will be held the last Wednesday of every month, from 6-7pm. Each group will allow for 20 group members, RSVP is required.

[CLICK HERE to get full details and Register](#)

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Our **Adult OCD Support/Skills Group**, led by Dr. Josh Spitalnick, is

an ongoing 8-session service and starts again this June, 2021. Marti Munford, LAPC has completed two amazing cohorts of parents for our **SPACE (Supporting Parents of Anxious Children's Emotions)** groups. More SPACE group will be announced soon, on our website and on social media.

A **no cost** monthly support group is being coordinated for any parents who have completed a SPACE group with us or if you have received individual/family based SPACE treatment by one of our clinicians. Be on the lookout for an announcement about this support group later this month on our FB page and website.

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Check out our [EVENTS](#) section of our website for descriptions, full flyers, and registration details for these and all other upcoming groups and events.



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