



From the Director's Desk



Dear Reader,

The last 12 months have forced us to re-evaluate how we live. We have redefined "quality" time with loved ones in person or over Zoom, how we spend money, how we network, how we parent, how we teach, how we provide therapy over the web, and how we take care of ourselves.

In reflection of the last year, I'm reminded daily that *"times of stress are also times that are signals for growth, and if we use it properly, we can grow through adversity."* I couldn't imagine a more relevant and purposeful mantra to define our current situation. If I've ever written or responded to you over email, you will have seen this quote below my signature line. These words are also central to the services my team and I provide as anxiety specialists. Who am I quoting? Rabbi and psychiatrist Abraham Twerski, who sadly passed away in January

2021 at the age of 90. He was a transformative thinker who inspired the world with his wisdom, sage advice, and poignant commentaries.

You didn't have to be Jewish (which I am) or be a mental health provider (which I am) to be influenced by his teachings. He was a prolific writer, authoring over 90 books, he was a spiritual leader, and he was important in the 12-step and AA recovery movement in the late 20th century. His contributions to the field of mental health are profound and many therapists still incorporate his lectures and ideas in their sessions.

For anxiety specialists and sufferers, his teachings offer hope, clarity of action, and purpose when doubt and fear are dominant barriers. I still use his videos in my therapy sessions regularly to put context behind the importance of exposure therapy and learning to live with fear. I will continue to share his ideas and teachings that inspire each of us to pursue full lives even when we are surrounded by fear, uncertainty, and stress. There are so many empowering and inspirational videos from Rabbi Twerski, and I've shared one below from which the above quote is credited.

In keeping with the theme of hope and growing through adversity, the CDC reports that almost 20% of Americans have received at least 1 of 2 COVID-19 vaccinations as of February 2021. The government just approved a single dose vaccination and many of our children are finally (or about to finally) attend school in person after 12 long months. There is a healthier and safer world in front of us. Until then, I hope everyone takes a moment in these stressful times to pause, appreciate the people and events around you that you can enjoy, rediscover your purpose and capabilities, and do what Rabbi Twerski charged all of us to consider: find ways to grow through so much adversity around us.

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

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

Click to watch 90 seconds of brilliance by Rabbi Twerski about responding to stress

Staff Updates

We are excited to announce our 2021-2022 Postdoctoral Fellows: Catherine Worthington, M.A. and Devika Basu, M.A. They will be both be joining us late summer/early Fall 2021.

Catherine Worthington, M.A. is a current pre-doctoral intern at Mt. Washington Pediatric Hospital, an APA accredited training site positioned within a pediatric rehabilitation hospital in Baltimore, MD. She is also a doctoral candidate from Spalding University, an APA accredited, scholar-practitioner program in Louisville, KY. During her graduate education, she completed four years of practicum training, and across six different placements, acquiring substantial experience working with children and adolescents presenting with numerous anxiety-related disorders, including behavioral sleep challenges, GAD, OCD, phobias, selective mutism, behavioral feeding disorders, early childhood trauma, disruptive family dynamics, and mood/behavioral dysregulation. This is also in addition to the valuable education she received in her clinical masters program at Columbia University, where her training was focused in the realm of mindfulness and mind-body treatment considerations for psychological difficulties.

Devika Basu, M.A. is a current a pre-doctoral intern at the Emory Child and Adolescent Mood Program (CAMP), and APA-accredited training site and interdisciplinary clinical research program that aims to provide and improve best practices for children and adolescents with mental health difficulties. This program is housed within Emory University's School of Medicine. Devika is also a doctoral candidate from Emory University's Clinical Psychology Program, an APA-accredited program in Atlanta, GA. Devika has co-led groups for

children with generalized anxiety, social anxiety, and OCD and skills groups for adults in the Emory OCD Intensive Outpatient Program. She has built a strong foundation in the principles underlying ethical and evidence-based care through coursework, research, and supervision. She has also completed an externship at the CHOA Strong4Life clinic, where she learned to collaborate with a multidisciplinary team to encourage behavioral change for children and adolescents seeking medical intervention.

We will share more details about their start dates, bios, and availability in the coming months and we can't wait to welcome them to our team as soon as possible. Best of luck to you both as you finish your successful graduate careers.

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.

Eating Disordered Behavior in Diverse Communities

by [Dr. Megan Faye](#), Licensed Psychologist
Anxiety, OCD, and Disordered Eating Specialist

Culture and identity play an important role in the development of an eating disorder. The community we belong to influences what we view as an “ideal” body, how we eat and interact with food, how we feel when we do not see our identities represented in “mainstream” culture, and added stressors related to holding a marginalized identity. Lack of representation in social



media, advertising, and movies or TV can also influence how we feel when we are not even included in the “ideal”.

Cultural factors that can influence body image, weight, and eating behaviors:

- Differing cultural practices related to food, eating, and its place in the family, as well as differing body image ideals, which can be tied to race, ethnicity, and country of origin
- Gender identity and messages related to masculinity and femininity
- Sexual identity communities, and experiences of objectification
- Sports and athletic communities and emphasis on weight and performance

It is also important to consider the intersection of these identities. Many people belong to more than one community, which can lead to conflicting messages about weight and body image.

Racial and Ethnic Communities

Historically, research and media has created an image that eating disorders occur mainly in young, White, cisgender women. This is not true!

LGBT+ Communities

Eating disordered behavior looks vastly different within each of the LGBT+ communities and subcultures. Differing experiences of the body, gender and identity, and levels of objectification can all play a role.

Minority Stress and Representation

Stress impacts wellbeing. Members of marginalized, minority, and BIPOC communities are more likely to experience stressors related to social and systemic inequities, prejudice, and barriers to receiving needed care and support, which can in turn impact mental health.

It is important to note that eating disorders occur at equal rates across

ethnic and racial groups in the United States, and at higher rates in the LGBT+ communities, yet are less likely to be identified and treated in these communities. Culture and identity can impact eating disordered behavior, and the staff at Anxiety Specialists of Atlanta are dedicated to incorporating your unique lived experience in our approach to treatment, whether we are seeing you for disordered eating, anxiety, OCD, or other problem areas.

To read the full article, "Eating Disordered Behavior in Diverse Communities" by Dr. Megan Faye, filled with evidence-based information and research findings, [Click here](#).

Science Matters

ADHD on the Rise: Pandemic Epidemic?
by [Dr. Grace Barnes](#), Licensed Psychologist
ADHD and Executive functioning Specialist

As a psychologist who is specialized in testing and assessment for children, adolescents, and young adults, I have witnessed a striking increase in requests for ADHD and other learning disorder specific evaluations since the beginning of the pandemic. Studies are currently underway to determine the recent trend, and whether it is driven in large part by the move from in-person school to virtual learning.

Per the CDC, there are approximately 6.1 million children in the United States between the ages of 2 and 17 who have an ADHD diagnosis. Children with undiagnosed ADHD and other learning disorders are struggling more than their peers to keep up with the pace of virtual learning due to the loss of classroom structure, as well as the increase in demand for independent functioning and sustained attention. A recent article in NBC news documented this trend which is occurring across the country. Parents are now seeing how difficult it is for children to sit still and remain focused for virtual learning. This has also led children to demonstrate a decrease in motivation to complete school work, as well as an increase in anxiety related to academics and depression. What does the science tell us:

- A recent peer-reviewed article in the Journal of Adolescent Health indicated that adolescents with ADHD had fewer routines and more remote learning difficulties than adolescents without ADHD.
- Parents of adolescents with ADHD had less confidence in managing remote learning and more difficulties in supporting home learning and home–school communication.
- These findings suggested that it is imperative for schools and communities to provide the necessary supports to adolescents, particularly those with mental health and/or learning difficulties, and to their parents.

As a practice, we are here to support parents and children as they are struggling to meet the demands of a virtual curriculum. On the bright side, this is an opportunity for children to be correctly diagnosed at an early age, which is always more helpful for children in the long run. Psychological assessment provides an opportunity for children to be correctly diagnosed, and for parents to receive valuable information that can help both teachers and parents provide the right type of supports, which will ultimately set children up to feel more empowered and academically successful.

There are proven ways to help children with ADHD in any learning environment, with virtual environments needing these modifications even more, including:

- Increasing structure and predictability
- Allow children to take brain and body breaks
- Partner with teachers and encourage the teacher to check in with the student with ADHD to ensure attention and understanding
- Chunk lessons into shorter units
- Help the student stay on track with time by setting reminders and keeping visual calendar
- Keep the child engaged with learning by incorporating hands-on activities at home
- Empower the student to ask for extra teacher assistance when needed
- Consider working with a tutor or executive functioning coach
- Set up social opportunities either online or in person

References and Resources:

1. Becker, S, et al. Remote Learning During Covid-19: Examining School Practices, Service Continuation, and Difficulties for Adolescents with and without Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. (October 2020). Journal of Adolescent Health.

2. <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/features/adhd-and-school-changes.html>
3. <https://www.edutopia.org/article/5-ways-support-kids-adhd-during-remote-learning>
4. <https://chadd.org/when-children-with-adhd-attend-school-from-home-an-experts-tips>

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.

Lizzie Booher, APC completed S.P.A.C.E. training led by Dr. Eli Leibowitz of Yale University.

Dr. Katie Cullum has been re-appointed to the Board of OCD Georgia.

Dr. Shannan Edwards completed S.P.A.C.E. training led by Dr. Eli Leibowitz of Yale University.

Dr. Cameron Mosley presented to master's-level practicum students at Positive Development in Jacksonville, FL, providing education and best practices for learning about "Treatments for Youth Anxiety."

Dr. Cameron Mosley recently co-authored a peer-reviewed publication Friedberg, R.D., Rozmid, E., Atasuntseva, A., Mosley, C., Wilberding, N., LaPrade, R., Wister A., & Feezer, J. (2020). "Project Chill: Program Description and Session Feedback Data From a Proof-of-Concept Study of a School-Based Psychoeducational Program Using Creative Media." *Cognitive and Behavioral Practice*.

Marti Munford, LAPC recently presented an introductory didactic on S.P.A.C.E. (Supportive Parenting for Anxious Childhood Emotions) to parents who are enrolled in our first cohort of S.P.A.C.E. Skills Group.

Dr. Jessica Nasser gave a didactic seminar to Emory University's Child and Adolescent Mood Program psychology PhD interns. The seminar topic was on treating Obsessive Compulsive Disorder in

children and adolescents using Exposure and Response Prevention.

Dr. Josh Spitalnick presented to the International OCD Foundation's (IOCDF) Monthly professional group on Advocacy for OCD regarding professional development and career considerations to be more engaged on advocacy opportunities.

Dr. Josh Spitalnick conducted a FB live event for parent of anxious kids on the topic of Anxiety in School and Student rights, advocating for your anxious child needs, and when to seek out IEP/504 accommodations.

Dr. Josh Spitalnick presenting on the importance of Evidence-Based Assessments in clinic care in collaboration with nView, an organization that gives healthcare professionals, educators and researchers access to innovative solutions and services that enable them to better identify, diagnose, treat and monitor the mental health of each person who needs assistance. [Click here](#) to watch this video.

Dr. Theresa Welles presented a live event over Zoom to her alma mater, Florida State University and a group of over 250 students of sorority members of Gamma Phi Beta for Q & A, information, and resources about the epidemic of anxiety among college students and how to effectively cope with anxiety.

Group Therapy Services

Our Adult OCD Support/Skills Group and Adult Health Anxiety Group filled up. The next cycle will re-open in May 2021.

Our brand new S.P.A.C.E. Skills Group for Parents/Caregivers is also now full!! Marti Munford, LAPC will be opening a 2nd Group very soon, is stay tuned.

Two groups are still open, and both start in early March:

- Dr. Megan Faye's Teen Girl Empowerment Group (aged 13-16) (starts 3/11 at 6pm)

- Dr. Theresa Welles' Support Groups for Moms of Anxious Children (starts 3/3)



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



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Our mailing address is:

Anxiety Specialists of Atlanta
1360 Center Drive, Suite 200
Dunwoody, GA 30338

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