



## News and Notes from Dr. Spitalnick



Welcome Back. The title of this newsletter intro has changed from "The Director's Desk" to "News and Notes." If you want to know why (teaser), keep reading. Otherwise, please check out all the exciting events, announcements, and mental health blogs below.

**“Sometimes to be in control you have to let go of control.” Weird, huh?**

There are many ways to say this, but if you work with an anxiety specialist, you will likely hear some version of this phrase in one of your sessions. Why? Because anxiety and OCD trick us in to believing that if we worry enough or do enough rituals or plan ahead enough to prevent a catastrophe, we can be a time traveler and effectively change the future. Sadly, this isn't the case or I would simply hand out

crystal balls here in the office.

You don't have to be an anxiety sufferer to have issues with control. So many of us try to make things better by overdoing it...whether it's over-researching the best schools for your children, looking at hundreds of paint colors before you redo your kitchen, spending endless hours tweaking your website, adding unnecessary quotes and citations to your college essays, fixing every little part of the photo for the family holiday card, or interviewing so many wedding planners you consider just doing it yourself. We go above and beyond what is necessary and sufficient until we get that "just right" feeling or, worse, until we run out of time.

If you run a small business like me, or manage a complex project at work, or put together charity events, or plan the first huge family vacation in years, you learn the hard way that you really don't control as much as you think you do. This is where anxiety creeps in and compels us to do more, control more, plan more, overthink, or Google non-stop. But none of these actions really give us more control and, ultimately, they just cause other issues. Plus, no matter how hard you work, no matter how many hours you put in, it's not sustainable without attention to balance, self-care, recognition of your successes and missed opportunities, and sometimes you need to ask for help.

The ability in key moments to slow down, take inventory, and actually give up some control, THAT...IS...HARD.... It's hard for so many of us. It's a science and an art. It's also a key ingredient to the work we do when treating anxiety and OCD.

I am appreciative of all the hard work everyone is putting in at the clinic, and seeing the demand for mental health services around the country continuing to rise, I have realized that something in our clinic needs to change. Whether we are a small practice or a growing group practice, I am always focused on doing everything possible to provide our patients and their families the best anxiety and OCD services in Georgia (I'm biased, of course). Aligned with that value and vision, I

have decided to do something that is not easy for me, and probably not easy for many small business owners. I am giving up some control of the operations of the practice.

Please know that my obligations and responsibilities to my staff and the amazing patients we serve are always in the front of my mind with each decision I make. It's a decision made easier when the people you are handing the keys to are outstanding humans, amazing clinicians, and adored friends and colleagues.

It feels great to announce that our first change begins with our new Clinical Director, Dr. Theresa Welles. There are so many wonderful things I could say about her. She is a poised, hard-working, strong leader, and of course, an amazing clinician. I'm thrilled to have her in this critical role, overseeing the operations and training of all of our clinicians and being the direct point of contact to all patient questions, concerns, or 5-star Google reviews.

As the Practice Owner and CEO, my role will shift even more to managing the growth and wide reach of the entire practice to ensure that our clinic never wavers from increasing the availability, affordability, and accessibility of evidence-based care for all anxiety and OCD warriors. I will continue to contribute academically and professionally to local and national organizations about anxiety/OCD treatment and training. I will continue to fundraise for and serve as an advocate for all OCD and anxiety warriors. I will still appear on various podcasts. And I will always take calls from people around the country asking for guidance for themselves or a loved one, a role that I cherish.

Most important, Dr. Welles and I will continue to be seeing patients regularly (we both love the work we do) because being an anxiety and OCD specialist is simply the coolest job in the world.

We encourage all of our patients to bravely give up control in certain ways to take back control in others, and I plan to do the same with

wide eyes and hopeful expectations for the next phase of our clinic. Dr. Welles, congratulations on this most deserving leadership role.

**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!

**If you want to send Congratulations messages or have any questions about our staff or clinical services, click here to email Dr. Theresa Welles**

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## Upcoming Events

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### **Atlanta 1 Million Steps 4 OCD Walk Fundraiser**

The 1 Million Steps 4 OCD Walk provides a supportive community, increases awareness, and raises funds for the International OCD Foundation (IOCDF) and its Local Affiliates (OCD Georgia), enabling them to continue their mission.



Please join team OCD Avengers (Anxiety Specialists of Atlanta's annual team name) on September 18, 2021 for the 1 Million Steps 4 OCD Walk fundraiser. Please walk with us, donate to the team, or send us words of encouragement. Our team is hoping to break \$5,000 this year. Ambitious we know, but we can do it together as a community!!

**To join Team OCD Avengers or simply to donate to our team and support us from afar, [CLICK HERE](#)**

Support us by either registering to walk with us or by making a donation to our team. The process is fast, easy, and secure... and you can be sure that it will benefit a great cause.

Our local state affiliate, OCD Georgia, will be hosting the event September 18, 2021 near Chastain Park. For more information about the the event in Atlanta, [CLICK HERE](#)

And just to entice you to join the team (or donate) and have some fun with all of us, here is Dr. Spitalnick and his family at the 2016 "1 Million Steps 4 OCD Walk."



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## Staff Updates

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### **Dr. Theresa Welles, Newly Appointed Clinical Director**

We couldn't be happier to announce Dr. Theresa Welles as our next Clinical Director, effective July 1, 2021.

Dr. Welles has over 20 years of professional experience in a variety of settings, ranging from school systems and universities, to medical facilities and private practice, making her uniquely qualified to work with children, adolescents and adults. In addition to her clinical work, Dr. Welles has been actively involved in leadership and advocacy roles. She received a Gubernatorial appointment to the board of directors for Florida Health Choices, Inc., by the Governor of Florida. She



has held leadership positions that made her responsible for overseeing clinical services in both university and medical settings. She is dedicated to supporting the success of future professionals in the field of psychology and has coordinated training and supervision programs at Universities, in Florida and Georgia.

In her new role, Dr. Welles will continue to see patients throughout the week, but she will also be overseeing, supporting, and developing the clinical staff, implementing strategies to ensure fidelity to evidence-based practices, and working with Dr. Spitalnick to expand the wonderful clinical services we currently offer.

The staff, the clinic, and the amazing clients we serve will all benefit with you as the Clinical Director. Congratulations for this much deserved leadership role!

## Science Matters

**Managing Social Anxiety in a Post-Pandemic World**  
by Dr. Cameron Mosley, Licensed Psychologist

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly altered our daily lives and continues to have a negative impact on mental health around the world. Initial CDC data suggests that prevalence of anxiety disorders is approximately 3 times what it was a year prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (Czeisler et al., 2020).

Social Anxiety Disorder impacts 7% of youth and adults and presents as extreme fear of negative evaluation in social situations (APA, 2013).

While there is not specific data yet for the prevalence of Social Anxiety Disorder during the pandemic, we can safely assume that the pandemic has impacted social anxiety sufferers in both positive and negative ways. Some people have noticed an increase in



social anxiety while coping with physical distancing and quarantine. Not surprisingly, for those who were already dealing with social anxiety, some may have actually noticed an improvement in their symptoms because they did not have to interact with people nearly as much (especially face-to-face) over the past year (Khan, Bilek, Tomlinson, & Becker-Haimes, 2021).

Now that we have somewhat adjusted to social distancing, we are newly faced with the dilemma of re-entering society. With COVID-19 rates changing week by week, mask mandates and social distancing protocols continue to shift, at times leaning towards life beginning to return to “a new normal.” But what does that mean for youth and adults living with Social Anxiety Disorder?

Many people are likely having anxiety about returning to social activities. There is a lot of uncertainty to navigate and this alone can increase social anxiety. Do I continue to wear masks or not, do I hug or fist bump? How do I start a conversation with someone I may not have seen for over a year? For those with Social Anxiety Disorder, it may

seem almost impossible to start over.

Luckily, anxiety specialists are well trained to address these issues. They have been treating social anxiety with cognitive-behavioral and exposure therapy long before the pandemic began. We can rely on these proven methods in therapy to guide our approach toward social situations in the coming months, whether you have therapist or not. Here are some actions to consider when trying to manage your social concerns:

- **Recognize that it is normal and acceptable to feel anxious.** You've been out of practice in social settings for over a year now. It's okay to feel anxious and you can handle those feelings. Acceptance of this reduces the fear that you are alone or that only you struggle with this.
- **Start small and slow.** Choose one safe activity you'd like to begin again (e.g., going to the gym, attending a club meeting). Do not feel pressure to re-start all of your previous activities at once.
- **Notice thoughts that are getting in the way.** If you're thinking, "I'm so awkward now" or "I don't have anything to talk about other than my vaccination," those thoughts will only serve to increase your avoidance urges. Challenge or accept those thoughts in a way that helps you approach the situation (for example, "Yes, I do feel awkward. And I bet everyone else does, too.") or prepare topics to discuss about new activities you are doing so you go in believing you have more to share.
- **Challenge yourself.** Once you've gotten used to one or two social situations, do something that makes you feel more uncomfortable (while still COVID-19 safe). Text someone you haven't seen for awhile and ask them to meet up at a park. Accept an invitation for a first date. Try a new activity.
- **Check in with your therapist or a friend.** If you're noticing difficulty "getting back out there," it may be a good time to schedule some booster therapy sessions or simply ask a close friend to join you in a new activity.

For more social anxiety resources, visit:

- American Psychiatric Association. (2013). Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (5th ed.).
- Czeisler, M. E., Lane, R. I., Petrosky, E., Wiley, J. F., Cristensen, A., Njai, R., ... Rajaratnam, S. M. W. (2020). Mental health, substance use, and suicidal ideation during the COVID-19 pandemic – United States June 24-30, 2020. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, 69, 1049-1057. doi:10.15585/mmwr.mm6932a1
- Khan, A. N., Bilek, E., Tomlinson, R. C., & Becker-Haimes, E. M. (2021). Treating social anxiety in an era of social distancing: Adapting exposure therapy for youth during COVID-19. Cognitive and Behavioral Practice. doi:10.1016/j.cbpra.2020.12.002

# 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.

## **Advocacy for the Autistic Community**

by Lizzie Booher, APC, Associate Professional Counselor  
Anxiety and OCD Specialist

A lawyer for one of the individuals implicated in the attacks on our nation's capital on January 6th released a statement claiming that his client, among others in attendance on that day, was easily compelled to storm the building due to being Autistic. He actually said much more disparaging and disgusting comments about those with documented psychiatric disorders or developmental disorders as a way to defend the rioters' violent actions. These statements are not only hurtful but the suggested link between violence and mental illness is not supported by research. It only serves to falsely shame and endanger the Autistic community.

Autism, also known as Autism Spectrum Disorder, is a developmental disability characterized by differences in thinking, processing, and communicating in the world. Autism is a type of Neurodivergence, meaning those who are Autistic show non-typical brain functioning compared to societal standards of what is considered “normal.”



Common characteristics of Autism are sensitivity to sounds or light, benefitting from more structure when starting and finishing tasks, difficulty with coordination, the presence of high focus on specific interests, and decreased eye contact or range of facial expressions. Autism is present in all communities of race, class, gender, age, and sexual/romantic orientation. One thing that Autism is not, is prone to violence towards others or propaganda as the aforementioned lawyer claimed.

This is not the first time that Autism has been blamed in the media for violence perpetrated against others. The Autism Self Advocacy Network (ASAN) released a report entitled [“Make Real Change on Gun Violence: Stop Scapegoating People with Mental Health Disabilities,”](#) compiling compelling research against the notion that those with developmental or intellectual disabilities are more likely to commit violent crimes. Among other data, this report cites an important analysis from [Everytown for Gun Safety](#) that tracks the trends of gun related homicide from 2009 to 2015 and found that of the 134 incidents, only 15 showed a history of mental health concerns brought to the attention of healthcare providers. In fact, many studies suggest that people with Disabilities of all kinds are [far more at risk for experiencing violence](#) at the hands of police due to misinterpretations of distress for violence. Simply put, the data does not support a connection between Autism and violence.

At Anxiety Specialists of Atlanta, we don't condone any form of physical violence against others, nor do we condone violent speech

against groups of Neurodivergent individuals, those who are marginalized or underrepresented, or who represent racial, ethnic, or sexual minority populations.

Autism information and Advocacy:

Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN): <https://autisticadvocacy.org/>

Autistic Women and Non-Binary Network (AWN):

<https://awnnetwork.org/news/>

Asperger's Experts: <https://www.aspergerexperts.com/>

Information on Neurodivergence: Therapist Neurodiversity Collective:

<https://therapistndc.org/education/>

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## Group Therapy & Support Groups

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Our **Teen Girl Empowerment Group**, led by Dr. Megan Faye, begins August 26, 2021, and registration is now open.

This group is for all female-identified teens ages 13-16 to have a space to connect and build skills around areas of self-esteem, relationships, body image, stress management, and other topics that impact teens as they transition back to school in the fall.



ANXIETY SPECIALISTS  
of ATLANTA  
Evidence-based Psychological Services



**TEEN GIRL EMPOWERMENT GROUP**

A THERAPY GROUP FOR BUILDING  
RELATIONSHIPS, STRESS MANAGEMENT SKILLS,  
BODY POSITIVITY, AND MORE!

**WHERE:** IN PERSON AT THE OFFICES OF THE ANXIETY SPECIALISTS OF ATLANTA  
**WHEN:** THURSDAYS FROM 6-7:30 PM, AUGUST 26TH - SEPTEMBER 30TH  
**WHO:** FEMALE-IDENTIFIED TEENS AGES 13-16  
**COST:** 6 SESSIONS, TOTAL COST \$360  
**LED BY:** DR. MEGAN FAYE

[SIGN UP UNDER THE "EVENTS" TAB AT ANXIETYSPECIALISTSOFATLANTA.COM](https://www.anxietyspecialistsofatlanta.com)

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



**Divorce and Separation Peer  
Support Group**

Co-facilitated by Dr. Theresa Welles & Dr. Chris Noble,  
Licensed Psychologists

Join our monthly **FREE Divorce and Separation Support Group**. This group takes place securely over Zoom, and it is 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. July's group will be 7/28 and August's will be 8/25. You must register for each monthly event separately.

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

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Marti Munford, LAPC has completed two amazing cohorts of parents for our **SPACE (Supporting Parents of Anxious Children's Emotions)** groups. The next SPACE group starts Tuesday August 10, 2021 and will run through Tuesday September 14, 2021. Each of the 6 sessions will take place over Zoom from 12-1:30pm.



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

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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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