



Clinical Insights

from Dr. Josh Spitalnick



October is a special month for mental health in so many ways, including National Depression Screening Day (October 7, 2021), World Mental Health Day (October 10, 2021), and near and dear to our team, OCD Awareness Week (October 10-16, 2021), to name a few.

OCD can be so debilitating and disabling that the World Health Organization (WHO) ranks it in the top ten most disabling illnesses of any kind (not just mental health illnesses), in terms of lost earnings and diminished quality of life. The same report also says that OCD is the fifth leading cause of disease burden for women aged 15-44 in the developed world. Yet, ***OCD is a treatable psychiatric illness and it has some of the BEST evidence-based treatment options among all the psychiatric disorders out there. THERE.IS.HOPE!***

Many of us just enjoyed the Annual OCD Conference, a wonderful three-day event (online this year) where therapists, researchers, OCD

warriors, and their family members all come together to learn, share resources, inspire one another, and find strength in numbers. It's a reminder to me about how much value there is in a community of sharing, a community of compassion, and a community of resources. Our team learns so much from this sense of community and we are always trying to find ways to extend it to the work that we do.

As much as we are an anxiety specialty team, we are equally an OCD specialty team, something I am so very proud of given the continued lack of awareness and resources for the OCD community and the impact OCD has had on my own family. We continue to offer regular OCD/Health Anxiety groups for adults, and just added a second group starting soon (registration details below). We are about to offer more SPACE groups for our parents of children with OCD/Anxiety. Our free support group for family members and loved ones who support other adults battling OCD started last month with a wonderful turnout and a powerful discussion. We keep adding more resources on our website related to OCD, including how to find a trained OCD therapist, what treatment resources are available locally and nationally, and recommended online and social media content that is education-rich and science-based.

We also fundraise each year to support OCD education and services locally and around the country. With your donations and the financial support of our team, I'm so proud to share our clinic, and the community that supports us, raised over \$2,250 at the recent 1 Million Steps for OCD Walk, the annual IOCDF sponsored fundraiser, locally run by OCD Georgia. [Team OCD Avengers](#) is active every year as the leading fundraising team here in Georgia, thanks to so many of you, and our staff. We are grateful for that support and for putting your trust in us. We will try to keep that fundraising streak active next year!!

It is our hope that if you or someone you know is battling OCD, you take a moment during this OCD Awareness Week to appreciate your own resilience and the compassion and patience that is required to get

through each day. There are many wonderful therapists in our group and around the country fighting each day, side-by-side with you, because we know that ***OCD is a treatable psychiatric illness and it has some of the BEST evidence-based treatment options among all the psychiatric disorders out there. THERE.IS.HOPE!***

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 if you have any questions, concerns, or positive news to share!

Upcoming Events



OCD Awareness Week

#OCDWeek began in 2009 introduced by the International OCD Foundation (IOCDF) to share knowledge and reduce stigma around OCD and related disorders. Each year in October, community groups, service organizations, and clinics around the world celebrate with OCD-inspired educational talks, art exhibits, grassroots fundraisers, and more.

This year, the IOCDF has multiple ways for you to get involved. Click below to see what they have planned and how you can get involved!

To see all the events and activities offer by the IOCDF for OCD Awareness week, [CLICK HERE](#)

Staff Updates

Welcome Dr. Devika Basu, Postdoctoral Clinical Fellow

We are excited to welcome our second Postdoctoral Fellow for the 2021-2022 training year, Dr. Devika Basu.



Dr. Basu is a psychologist joining us this month as a Child, Adolescent, and Young Adult Postdoctoral Fellow. She recently graduated from Emory University, earning her Ph.D., after completing a predoctoral internship in Child and Adolescent Clinical Psychology at the Emory School of Medicine's Child and Adolescent Mood Program. On internship, she was a J. Rex Fuqua Scholar utilizing CBT/ACT-informed and exposure-based techniques for the treatment of anxiety, mood, and eating disorders.

Dr. Basu specializes in treating anxiety disorders in children, teens, and young adults, and relies exclusively on evidence-based interventions, such as CBT, ERP, and ACT. She is also a specialist in treating depressive disorders and various eating-related difficulties such as binge eating. She recently completed intensive training in Supportive Parenting for Anxious Childhood Emotions (SPACE), in preparation for fellowship, to offer evidence-based approaches to working with parents of anxious children.

If you want to learn more about her impressive background, or what she does for fun away from work, click below. We are so very excited to have Dr. Basu join our team as the mental health needs of our community continue to rise. Devika, welcome to Anxiety Specialists of Atlanta, LLC!

[Click Here to see Dr. Basu's bio and contact information](#)

Science Matters

Is this me or my OCD?

by Dr. John Mohammadioun, Licensed Psychologist
An Anxiety, OCD and ERP/ACT Specialist

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

Are these worries that I'm having genuine concerns or is it just my OCD?

This question may sound familiar if you or a loved one has wrestled with obsessive thoughts. This is a great and understandable question, but the answer doesn't actually matter. If you're thinking, "but of course it matters," the following will help explain why we don't have to answer this question and how we can still move forward in our lives.



How we respond to an unwanted thought, image, or sensation and the resulting distress is more important than the

content of the thought, image, or sensation. A thought is just a thought until we apply meaning to it; different meanings often get different responses. For example, if a distressing thought pops up, my mind might say “hey this just made me feel really uncomfortable which means it must be really important. I should pay special attention to it.” Trust me, I’m not suggesting that we should not feel distressed at a distressing thought. Rather, we have a choice in what we do when we are feeling distressed about uncertainty.

Therefore, the question “Is this me or OCD?” does not always have to be answered. A better question to ask might be “how does spending time trying to figure out whether this is OCD or not help me get closer to the type of living I want to do?”.

Whether it is an OCD thought or not, there are a few concepts I encourage anyone to consider.

What function is this thought, image, sensation serving?

In other words, is this thought trying to find certainty about something that may have happened, is it trying to gain control over something that I am not in control of, is it trying to prepare me for a feared outcome, is the sensation causing me to avoid certain places or people, etc

How can I respond to this thought in a way that aligns with my values?

If someone is trying to figure out whether an unwanted thought/image/sensation is OCD or something else, how does that bring them closer to what is important in their life? One might argue “But if I can be certain that it is just an OCD thought, then I know it’s not really me.” I have no argument there because knowing might make someone feel better, but what happens when the next one shows up?

Should I practice responding differently to the obsession?

This is where ERP (Exposure and Response Prevention) and ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy) come into the picture. Instead of getting stuck on trying to figure out where they came from or how to fix them, we can allow them to come and go like bad commercials on the television. Keep in mind, you are already living with uncertainty and allowing thoughts/images/sensations to come and go on their own (like I bet you haven't looked to see if there is a spider crawling above you right now and yet you've been okay without knowing that, unless you just looked and now you know). With practice, motivation, and willingness to get comfortable with discomfort, you don't have to let your thoughts control you.

You are not your thoughts until they become beliefs that you chose to act on. Easier said than done, I know. #OCDAwarenessweek

[For the complete article for "Is this me or my OCD," Click Here](#)

We See you

This section is dedicated to sharing important resources related to mental health disparities, clinical issues specific to diverse populations, populations who have limited access to mental health care, and the impact of cultural issues in psychotherapy. Discussions about inclusiveness, equity, and diversity makes us a stronger team and create a work culture that is more validating and empowering for us all.

Honoring Breast Cancer Survivors and their Families

by Jen Powell, Licensed Professional Counselor
An Anxiety, OCD, Trauma, and Postpartum Specialist

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

Fighter. Victor. Overcomer. Champion. Whichever term you choose,

the month of October acknowledges and honors the women (and their families) who have battled and overcome breast cancer. Breast cancer awareness month reminds us of how resilient individuals can be when faced with the challenges that life throws at them.

The Facts:

- Breast Cancer is the leading cancer in women worldwide
- It's 2nd most common cancer overall
- It's the leading cause of cancer death in less developed countries
- It's the 2nd leading cause of cancer death in American women
- There are currently more than 3.8 million breast cancer survivors in the United States
- There is a 1 in 8 chance U.S. woman will develop breast cancer in her lifetime



Breast Cancer affects the woman and her support system.

- Feeling overwhelmed is a perfectly normal response to a breast cancer diagnosis.
- Breast cancer diagnosis can create feelings of powerlessness, anger, and sadness for the woman and her loved ones
- Many survivors encounter problems associated with physical and recreational activities, body image, fatigue, and pain
- Family member's reaction can be overwhelming for the patient, which can then make the woman reluctant to talk about it
- The side effects of cancer treatment can cause bodily changes, body image concerns, weight gain/loss, hair loss, and scarring
- Symptoms and treatment can impact sex and intimacy within romantic relationships

Encouraging news and reasons to be hopeful:

- Promisingly, breast cancer survival rates have increased notably in recent years; the number of deaths associated with this

disease is steadily declining

- Early detection, genetic testing, personalized approaches to treatment and a better understanding of the disease progression all positively impact the course of treatment and likelihood for remission
- When cancer negatively impacts intimacy in the relationship, maintain a connection to your partner with hugging, holding hands, and snuggling all help to maintain a sense of physical connection and intimacy, stabilizing the relationship
- Therapists can help spouses manage the challenge of offering both emotional and practical support while dealing with their own feelings.
- Children, parents, and friends involved in caretaking can also benefit from psychological interventions.
- Psychological treatment may even boost women's chances of survival. In one study, for instance, a decrease in depression symptoms was associated with longer survival in patients with metastatic breast cancer.
- Relying on mental health professionals to empower the survivor to make more informed choices in the face of often-conflicting advice can help them communicate more effectively with their health care providers.
- Many therapists are trained to support the woman work through their grief, fear, and other emotions, which can positively impact response to cancer treatment by reducing emotional stress on the body
- Surviving breast cancer often provides a new sense of meaning and purpose in the lives of those that have fought and overcome the battle.

Women are not statistics. They are our mothers, daughters, sisters, friends, co-workers... and remind us of how resilient we can be.

Beating breast cancer often provides a new sense of meaning and purpose in the lives of survivors and their loved ones who have fought and overcome the battle.

To access the full article on Breast Cancer Awareness or to access local and national resources, [Click Here](#)

Group Therapy & Support Groups

Join our **Adult Social Anxiety Group**, led by Dr. Megan Faye, which begins October 20, 2021. Registration is now open.

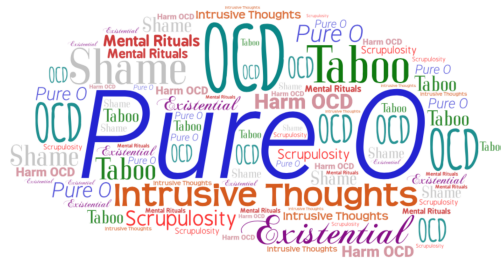
This group is for adults (18+) who are seeking group-based treatment and support for social anxiety. This group will be discussing common social anxiety concerns and practicing exposure-based tools to overcome social anxiety. This group will be offered via Zoom.



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

Join our **Adult OCD/Health Anxiety Support and Skills Group**, led by Dr. Jessica Nasser, beginning October 20, 2021 from 8-930pm

EST. Registration is now open.



This group meets every other week. Facilitated by Dr. Jessica Nasser and led by group attendees, participants will revisit the basics of OCD/Health Anxiety along with strategies behind effective Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP). Each meeting will start with a discussion of common questions and challenges affecting OCD/Health Anxiety sufferers and a review of recent ERP goals. Group members will be given ample opportunity to share their own successes and struggles, past and current. Members will also set weekly ERP goals with each other at the end of each meeting. Finally, members will be able to offer support and guidance to group members as well as receive encouragement and inspiration from each other.

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

Join our monthly FREE Support Group for **Adults supporting other Adults with OCD**, whether it's a family member, a loved one, a spouse/partner, or your adult child. This group takes place securely over Zoom once per month, and it starts this month. This month it will take place at 8pm on October 18, 2021.



This is not a treatment group, it's a support group. This monthly group will provide a space for support and discussions about the do's and don'ts of supporting a loved one with OCD and/or health anxiety. We will discuss family accommodations, treatment considerations, and self-care in the process.

This group is led by Dr. Josh Spitalnick. It is held the 3rd Monday of every month, from 8-9pm. Each group will allow for up to 20 group members.

No registration required, just click below to access access the Event page and the zoom link.

[CLICK HERE to access details and the Zoom link](#)

Join our monthly **FREE Divorce and Separation Support Group**.
This group takes place securely over Zoom.



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, no registration required. Just click below to access access the Event page and the zoom link.

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

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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