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Center for the
Treatment and
Study of Anxiety



Perelman
School of Medicine
UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA

INTRODUCTION TO THE NEWSLETTER

By Dr. Lily Brown

The Center for the Treatment and Study of Anxiety (CTSA) at the University of Pennsylvania has undergone significant changes in the past 5 years. We have hired outstanding new research faculty, clinical faculty, postdoctoral fellows, and research assistants. In addition, we have expanded our research mission to include a focus

on anxiety-related disorders and suicide risk. Our clinical training mission has expanded, as has our expertise in direct service provision. **This quarterly newsletter allows for us to share recent developments and to build community around evidence-based practices for anxiety and suicide risk.** Each issue, we will have a



LILY A. BROWN, PHD

Director
Center for the Treatment and
Study of Anxiety



“Working together to improve outcomes”

clinical tip corner to share actionable strategies to support clinical implementation of evidence-based practices. For our inaugural issue, we have the opportunity to learn from Dr. Sandy Capaldi on strategies to support processing in exposure therapy.

If you like what you learn, Dr. Capaldi is offering a CE-eligible workshop on the topic on June 4. Check our our website to register at https://www.med.upenn.edu/ctsa/training_opportunities.html.

Each newsletter will also include a research update where we will

highlight recent publications or descriptions of newly funded or ongoing grants. In this issue, Dr. Erica Weitz describes her recently funded grant, in collaboration with CTSA alum Dr. Rachel Schwartz, to study exposure and response prevention (ExRP) for obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) during the perinatal period.

Finally, each issue will include a featured upcoming training or consultation opportunity. This issue describes a group consultation model for ExRP for OCD developed by Dr. Liz Turk-Karan.

At the CTSA, we are passionate about our mission of clinical care, research, and training in evidence-based practices for anxiety-related disorders. If you have a topic which you would like to see in an upcoming newsletter, please reach out (see Talk to Us, below)!

Thanks for being part of our mission - Lily A. Brown, PhD, Director, CTSA

Talk To Us

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<https://www.med.upenn.edu/ctsa/>



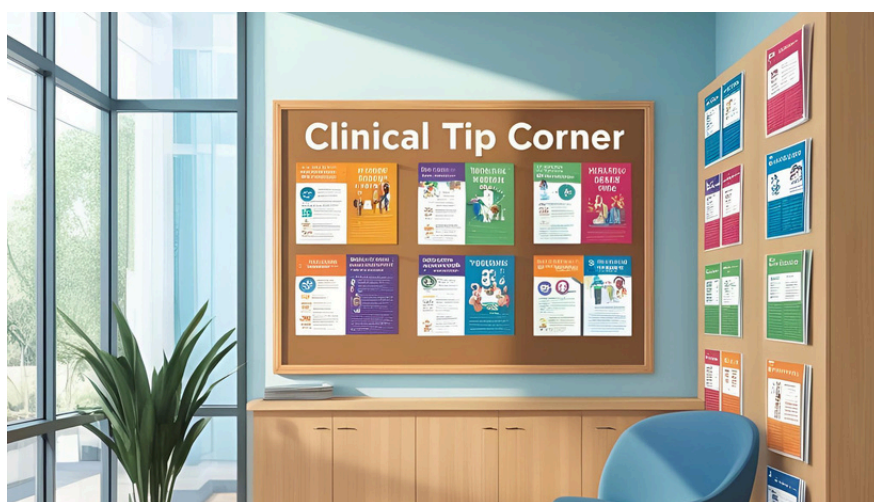
[Click here to join our mailing list!](#)



Connect on social media!

For All: [Facebook](#)

For clinicians: [Join the Official Prolonged Exposure Therapy Facebook Group](#)



Optimizing Processing in Exposure

Dr. Sandy Capaldi

Conducting effective processing in Prolonged Exposure (PE) therapy for PTSD can be complex, even for experienced clinicians. However, two critical strategies can help to optimize processing and improve outcomes for clients.

Identifying Meaning

This involves guiding clients to explore not only what happened, but what it means about them, their identity, and their place in the world. In processing, encourage your client to examine deeply held beliefs that may have developed as a result of their experience. For example, a

client who endured childhood abuse may have internalized a belief that they are unworthy of love or care. “What do you think this event meant about you?” is a good way to start. Exploring whether they view themselves as weak, responsible for what happened, or fundamentally changed can lead to meaningful insights. Through these discussions, clients can reevaluate the meaning they’ve assigned to their experiences.

Considering Context

Contextualizing trauma is essential for helping clients integrate their

experiences into a broader understanding of themselves and the world. When therapists guide clients in exploring both micro and macro levels of context, they can support deeper insight and promote adaptive meaning-making.

On a micro level examining specific moments within the trauma helps clients understand their own reactions and choices. For example, what factors shaped their decision in the moment? Were they driven by fear, survival instincts, past experiences, external pressures? Exploring the situation with this additional context (their available options, emotional state, or physical constraints) can help them to see it differently.

On the macro level, stepping back to view the bigger picture enables clients to recognize how prior experiences and relationships may have influenced their beliefs and decisions related to the trauma. By weaving their trauma narrative into the broader framework of their history, relationships, and belief systems, clients can gain a more comprehensive understanding and a new perspective on their trauma.



Dr. Sandy Capaldi
Associate Director

To learn more

For clinicians looking to refine their approach to processing in PE, Dr. Sandy Capaldi will be hosting a Special Topics in PE workshop, offering practical strategies for clinicians at all experience levels. Join us for expert insights on effectively navigating processing like a pro!



PE Certification Program
Therapist, consultant, trainer

[Click here to learn about becoming a PE certified therapist, consultant, or trainer.](#)



ExRP Certification Program

[Click here to learn about becoming an ExRP certified therapist.](#)



Research Update

Dr. Erica Weitz

We are thrilled to announce that we have recently received a notice of award for an NIMH R03 grant to study treatments for perinatal OCD.

Perinatal OCD can affect up to 8% of birthing people in pregnancy and 16% in the postpartum period and is associated with a host of delivery complications and deleterious outcomes for both parent and infant.



Erica Weitz, PhD,
Assistant Professor,
CTSA

To respond to this maternal health crisis, there is a need to identify safe, tolerable and effective treatments for this population. Exposure and Response Prevention (ExRP) as well as Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SRIs) are generally safe and effective first-line treatments, however, pregnant people have mostly been excluded from these trials due to safety concerns. Therefore, empirical evidence for the treatment of perinatal OCD, especially during pregnancy, is extremely limited. To better understand how perinatal OCD patients are treated in real-world setting, Dr. Rachel Schwartz (CTSA alum) and myself proposed a research study to use secondary data analysis including chart review of patients presenting for treatment of OCD in

pregnancy at Roger's Behavioral Health (an intensive outpatient program with multiple sites across the US). The objective of the R03 study is to understand not only how perinatal patients are treated in real-world settings, but how they respond to and tolerate these interventions. We will use existing treatment data to evaluate the efficacy, safety, and tolerability of first-line OCD treatments in the perinatal period (namely ExRP and SRI treatment). We also aim to understand how these treatments are adapted and modified for this specific population and whether these modifications improve outcomes related to effectiveness, safety, and tolerability. Our hope is that leveraging this existing data can provide a unique opportunity to serve a difficult-to-study population in need of empirically guided care. Using the largest sample to date, this study will impart an understanding of how to treat OCD safely and effectively during the perinatal period, justifying the inclusion of perinatal patients in future RCTs with extended follow ups and inform subsequent research studies to improve outcomes. We are excited to begin this endeavor in July of this year.

Certified by us?

Email Dr. Sandy Capaldi (sandraca@penmedicine.upenn.edu) to get added to our certified ExRP therapist and certified PE therapist lists!



[Click here to find a certified Exposure and Response Prevention \(ExRP\) Therapist for Obsessive Compulsive Disorder \(OCD\).](#)



[Click here to find a certified Prolonged Exposure \(PE\) therapist for posttraumatic stress disorder \(PTSD\).](#)



Group Consultation in ExRP

Dr. Elizabeth Turk-Karan

Many clinicians have read about exposures or even taken a workshop on exposures, but have never done an exposure with a patient. Other therapists have done exposures with patients, but



Elizabeth Turk-Karan PhD,
Director of Practicum &
Internship

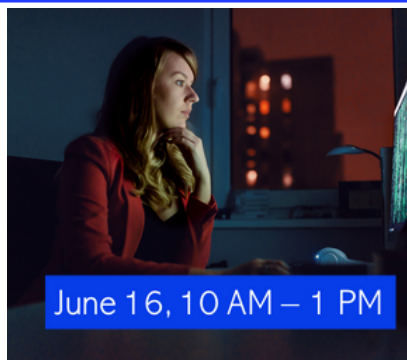
wondered whether they could be doing exposures more effectively. Many professionals wish that they could discuss their difficult cases with a trusted expert. Would you like to join a group of other clinicians to present cases, receive expert feedback, consultation, and support? The CTSA offers Group Consultation in Exposure Therapy for APA approved CE credits. We meet for 90 min every week and discuss issues and concerns with cases of all ages and diagnoses. Groups involve clinicians new to exposure therapy as well as more experienced

exposure therapists. Group discussions are determined by the interest of participants. Lively discussions can include “what should be my first exposure with this patient”, “how do I get my patient to do their homework”, “when should I use an in vivo exposure vs an imaginal exposure vs an interoceptive exposure”, and “is this even the correct diagnosis”. All questions are welcome in this friendly, supportive environment.

Research has shown that taking a workshop rarely changes a clinician’s behavior in therapy, but that supervision or consultation improves a therapist’s adherence to a therapy protocol as well as patients’ improvement in treatment. Group members have reported that consultation improved their therapeutic skills as well as their comfort and confidence in doing exposure treatment. Many clinicians have found group consultation so beneficial that they have chosen to take another series of group consultation sessions. The next Group Consultation for Exposure Therapy starts Wednesday, June 11 at 2pm EST. All licensed or supervised professionals are welcome. [Click here to register!](#)

APA CE Credits

The CTSA is dedicated to training clinicians in treating anxiety and related disorders with evidence-based practices. Our convenient online trainings are available to clinicians everywhere.



CE Opportunity: Telehealth for Anxiety and Suicide Risk: Ethical Considerations and Practical Strategies to Optimize Treatment Outcomes and Safety



CE Opportunity: ExRP for Pediatric OCD

Upcoming CE trainings

Click each topic to register!

Special Topics in PE: Processing

4 CE

June 4, 2025, 10:00am to 2:00pm EST

6-week Online Group Consultation for Exposure Therapy

9 CE

Wednesdays 2 - 3:30, Starting June 11, 2025

Telehealth for Anxiety and Suicide Risk: Ethical Considerations and Practical

3 CE

Strategies to Optimize Treatment Outcomes and Safety

June 16, 10 AM - 1 PM

EX/RP for Pediatric OCD

6.5 CE

June 18, 2025, 9 AM - 5 PM

Intensive Workshop in Prolonged Exposure Therapy for PTSD

24 CE

July 28 - 31, 2025

Sexual dysfunction in anxiety disorders

6.5 CE

August 7, 2025, 9 AM - 5 PM

Special Topics in PE: The Assessment Phase of Treatment

6 CE

September 26, 2025, 9 AM - 5 PM

Prolonged Exposure Therapy for Adolescents with PTSD

6 CE

October 24, 2025, 9 AM - 5 PM

Prolonged Exposure Consultant Workshop

32.5 CE

November 3 - 7, 2025

We work with individual clinicians, private practices, community mental health agencies, and larger systems (hospitals, corrections facilities) to provide educations and skills needed to effectively treat anxiety and related disorders in the population they serve.

For more information about any of our training and implementation services, contact Dr. Sandy Capaldi at sandraca@penntmedicine.upenn.edu



Subscribe: <https://www.youtube.com/user/Center4Anxiety>

Have you experienced a **trauma**?

You might be eligible for a research study. During the study you would complete an online screener, a phone screener, a clinical interview, and three brain scans.

You would also complete a series of computer tasks to assess your reactions to different kinds of content, including some relevant to your trauma.

Throughout the study you would receive a type of **brain stimulation** that would either be real or fake, determined through the flip of a coin. You would be paid to participate in the study.

If you want to see if you are eligible, please complete the online screen by clicking [here](#).

For questions, you can also reach out to Dr. Sonalee Joshi at sonalee.joshi@pennmedicine.upenn.edu or 215-746-3342.



Through research, adults with OCD may be eligible for no-cost treatment

We are seeking individuals who have obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) to participate in research that offers payment and no cost-treatment.

To inquire, visit:
tinyurl.com/pennOCDstudy

or scan the QR code:



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