

Clemson College of Education alumna provides counseling and educational workshops to upstate parents

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A Clemson graduate from the [clinical mental health counseling program](#) is working with upstate families to address emotional distress and its effect on children. Susannah Baldwin, a 2011 graduate from the program and current licensed professional counselor at Bay Laurel Center in Greenville, specializes in providing counseling and educational workshops to help parents address issues that may negatively affect the whole family.

According to Baldwin, the time parents spend on preparing a nursery or acquiring diapers might be better spent concentrating on their own relationship. Baldwin takes a broad view of the entire “reproductive journey” that all adults or couples go through when starting a family, and the stresses, common pitfalls and often incorrect assumptions that go along with that journey.

“We are a consumer-driven culture, so we concentrate more on having the right birth plan or car seat rather than having a conversation about how the baby will affect date night or our sex life,” Baldwin said. “Parents often ignore the potential issues that might be created or get worse as the family gets larger.”

Susannah Baldwin specializes in providing counseling and educational workshops to help parents address issues that may negatively affect the whole family.

Image Credit: Susannah Baldwin

Baldwin graduated from Clemson in 2011 with a master’s degree in clinical mental health counseling, and soon after began counseling pregnant and postpartum mothers. She was struck by their unique struggles and the prevalence of mood and anxiety disorders within the demographic. Because there were few other therapists focusing on this specific population, Baldwin enrolled in advanced training courses in maternal mental health from Postpartum Support International. She

also attended a professional development course with Karen Kleinman, author and expert on postpartum depression.

When Baldwin began investigating just how important—and potentially damaging—mental health can be in new families, she knew she had found her focus. When individuals or families experience emotional distress, children can experience negative outcomes related to their physical, intellectual and emotional health. An estimated 20 percent or more of women develop post-partum depression, and an estimated 10 percent of new parents experience moderate levels of anxiety related to having a child. Relationships suffer, with well over half of couples reporting that having a baby negatively affected their relationship.

Her endeavors to further her knowledge in the field paid off quickly. Baldwin's clientele grew rapidly and she went into private practice in order to focus on the hidden-in-plain-sight "reproductive journey community" she had discovered. Mental health counselors with her level of advanced training are in short supply in the upstate, but Baldwin hopes her work will change that.

"I feel like there's a momentum shift," Baldwin said. "I'm passionate about this work, I want to talk about it and more and more clinicians want to hear about it."

In addition to providing counseling and services directly to new parents, Baldwin has been advocating by spreading the word about maternal and paternal mental health throughout the medical community. Although medical professionals don't routinely screen for depression and anxiety, they can play a vital role in identifying warning signs, encouraging people to seek counseling and decreasing the stigma associated with depression and anxiety.

According to Amy Milsom, professor in Clemson's [College of Education](#), Baldwin's advocating efforts in particular were admirable and evident when Milsom served as her supervisor while Baldwin worked toward her counseling license.

"Susannah put so much energy and enthusiasm into getting the word out to other professionals," Milsom said. "I learned a lot from her about this topic when we collaborated on a publication to identify intervention strategies and resources that are out there for parents."

The challenge, according to Baldwin, is finding a way to include this kind of counseling in a medical model where it doesn't easily fit. Mental health issues aren't easily measured, they come with negative stigma and OBs and psychiatrists are hesitant to prescribe medicine to women who are pregnant or breastfeeding. Because of these obstacles, Baldwin has been fighting an uphill battle that she doesn't believe will get easier any time soon, but the rewards are worth it for her.

“There’s nothing more fulfilling than getting a photo of a happy baby—with a happy family—from someone I’ve helped who’s overcome trouble,” Baldwin said. “Knowing that I’ve positively affected people at their most vulnerable and crucial juncture makes it worth it.”

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