AUTHOR: Dr Vivienne Lewis SECTION: GENERAL NEWS ARTICLE TYPE: NEWS ITEM AUDIENCE : 42,983
PAGE: 32 PRINTED SIZE: 156.00cm² REGION: ACT MARKET: Australia ASR: AUD 560 WORDS: 467
ITEM ID: 1259219525



12 NOV, 2026

Five things psychologists wish everyone knew

Canberra Weekly, Canberra

health & wellbeing

Five things psychologists wish everyone knew



with **DR VIVIENNE LEWIS**
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Next week is Psychology Week (16-22 November) – an annual celebration of psychology and the difference it can make in people's lives. This year's theme is "Psychology in action: how psychology changes lives." It's a chance to celebrate the work psychologists do, recognise psychology's contribution to our communities and help people understand what psychology is.

Psychology isn't just about diagnosing mental illness or talking about your childhood. Psychologists work across hospitals, schools, universities, workplaces, sport, community services, research and private practice. Psychological science can also help all of us understand why we think, feel and behave the way we do. So, for Psychology Week, here are five things I wish more people knew.

First, feelings aren't facts. Something can feel true without necessarily being true. You might feel everyone is judging you, that you've failed or that something terrible will happen. The feeling is real, but the conclusion may not be. A useful skill is asking: What do I actually know, and what am I assuming?

Second, avoidance usually makes anxiety bigger. Avoiding something frightening gives us immediate relief, but it can also teach our brain that the situation really was dangerous. Sometimes the way through anxiety isn't waiting to feel confident. It's taking a manageable step while anxious and discovering that we can cope.

Third, boundaries aren't selfish. Saying no doesn't make you unkind. You're allowed to have limits around your time, energy and availability. You don't have to attend everything, answer every message immediately or solve everyone else's problems. Healthy relationships have room for both people's needs.

Fourth, rest isn't something you have to earn. This is particularly important as we head towards the end of the year. We often treat rest as a reward for finishing everything – except everything is never finished. Sleep, food, movement, connection, enjoyment and rest are basic needs, not indulgences. Sometimes being productive means stopping.

Finally, you don't have to like yourself every day to look after yourself. You can dislike your body today and still nourish it. You can doubt yourself and still apply for the job. You can feel anxious and still show up. We don't need to wait until we feel good about ourselves before treating ourselves with care.

Perhaps that's psychology in action. Psychology can't remove every difficult thought, feeling or experience, but it can help us understand ourselves and others, respond differently when old patterns aren't helping, and make choices that move us towards the lives we want to live.

To learn more about Psychology Week, psychological health and wellbeing, or finding a psychologist, visit the Australian Psychological Society (APS) at psychology.org.au. You might also be interested in reading my latest book on everyday psychology called It's Not Just You (ausapress.com/p/9781923114227).

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