



MARCH
2025
VOL. 39

The Psychology Couch Newsletter

IN THIS ISSUE:

The Connection Between
Movement and Mood:
How Exercise Enhances
Mental Health

Kirsten Mynhardt
BSocSci Psych Hons Graduate

Dr Moodley: A GP with a
special interest in Psychiatry

The Power of Connection

Natola Msidi
BSocSci Hons (Psychology) Graduate

Understanding Down Syndrome

Zandile Tshuma
BA (HONS), UNISA

Dear Evan Hansen: The
importance of mental health
representation in media

Jocelyn Chinniah
(B.A. Psychology undergraduate student,
UJ)

The Psychological Impact of
Witnessing War Online

Anovuyo Ntebe
BA Psychology Student (UJ)

Successful volunteer training
at The Couch

The Connection Between Movement and Mood:

How Exercise Enhances Mental Health

by Kirsten Mynhardt (BSocSci Psych Hons graduate)

We often hear about the benefits of exercise, yet when life gets busy, movement is one of the first things we neglect. Whether it's work deadlines, family responsibilities, or sheer exhaustion, finding the motivation to be active can feel like an uphill battle. But what if we viewed movement not as another task on our to-do list, but as a powerful tool for improving mental well-being? The truth is, even small amounts of physical activity can have a profound impact on our mood, stress levels, and overall mental health.

Why Movement Matters for Mental Health

It is no secret that the mind and body are deeply interconnected, so it should come as no surprise that physical activity plays a crucial role in emotional well-being.

Movement Makes You Feel Good

When engaging in physical activity, your body releases endorphins – natural mood boosters. These neurotransmitters help alleviate stress and create a sense of euphoria. Exercise even increases serotonin and dopamine levels, which are essential for emotional stability and happiness.

Reduces Stress and Anxiety

Exercise helps regulate the body's stress response by lowering cortisol levels. Activities such as yoga, walking, or even dancing can provide an immediate sense of relaxation and reduce anxious thoughts. Movement also encourages deep breathing, which further calms the nervous system and promotes a sense of peace.



Improves Sleep Quality

Exercise helps regulate sleep patterns, allowing for deeper and more restful sleep at night. In fact, not only does it improve sleep quality, but it also even helps you fall asleep faster.

Enhances Cognitive Function

Regular physical activity improves brain function, memory, and concentration. Movement increases blood flow to the brain, delivering oxygen and essential nutrients that enhance cognitive performance. This makes it easier to focus, process emotions, and make clearer decisions.

Builds Emotional Resilience

Physical activity can be a powerful coping mechanism for difficult times. Movement helps build mental resilience by providing an outlet for frustration, reducing negative thoughts, and reinforcing a sense of accomplishment. Over time, consistent exercise strengthens emotional endurance and the ability to handle life's ups and downs.

Move with Others

Join a dance class, take a walk with a friend, or try a team sport to combine social interaction with movement.

Make It Fun

Choose activities you genuinely enjoy—whether it's cycling, swimming, or even gardening.

Easy Ways to Get Started

The good news is simple everyday actions can help boost your well-being. Here are a few simple ways to integrate more physical activity into your routine:

Start Small

Even five minutes of movement is better than none. Gradually increase your activity level over time.

Go for a Walk

A short 15–30 minute walk in nature can significantly reduce stress and improve mood.

Stretch and Breathe

Gentle stretching or yoga first thing in the morning can set a positive tone for the day.

Movement is more than just a workout—it's a celebration of what your body can do. It is a path toward emotional balance. When you move, you're not just exercising, you're telling yourself that you are worth the effort and that your well-being matters. So, take that first step—whether it's a slow stretch, a brisk walk, or a full workout. **You deserve to feel your best.**





Meet Dr Moodley

We are thrilled to welcome Dr. Moodley, a **GP with a special interest in Psychiatry**, to The Couch! Dr. Moodley's unique expertise in both general healthcare and mental health care will be a valuable addition to our team as we continue our mission to provide holistic care to our clients.

As a GP with a special interest in Psychiatry, Dr. Moodley brings a distinctive approach to patient care by combining comprehensive physical health assessments with a deep understanding of mental health. Here's how Dr. Moodley will enhance our team:

- **Medical Assessment:** Dr. Moodley will evaluate both physical and mental health, offering a holistic understanding of each patient's needs and providing more well-rounded care.
- **Mental Health Support:** With a focus on psychiatry, Dr. Moodley is equipped to offer expert guidance and treatment for various mental health conditions, ensuring our clients receive the support they deserve.
- **Holistic Treatment Plans:** Working alongside our dedicated team of mental health professionals, Dr. Moodley will collaborate on creating personalized care strategies, providing integrated treatment plans that address both mental and physical health.

We're excited about the wealth of knowledge Dr. Moodley brings and look forward to the positive impact he will have on our clients' journeys toward better health and well-being. Welcome to the team, Dr. Moodley!

"There is no health
without mental health"

The Power of Connection

THE COUCH



Social Support and Mental Health

BY: NATOLA MSIDI

In an increasingly fast-paced and digitally connected world, the essence of human relationships remains a cornerstone of our well-being. The bonds we share with friends, family, and social networks play a vital role in shaping our mental health. This article explores the profound impact of social support, especially during challenging times, and offers guidance on cultivating meaningful relationships.

The Social Relationships' Impact on Mental Health Friendship and Resilience

When it comes to stress, friendship is the first line of defense for most people. It is a substantial social relationship that contributes to good mental health. Family connections can be a solid source of support and a stable foundation. When family members are close, the dynamics of a family can be their best kind of reinforcement, which is important for mental health as well as for the kinds of feelings that make one safe and sound in the world. Families are vital to a kind of mental health. Supporting family members assists them in dealing with the stressors of life and provides a guide to and encouragement in working through life and mental health issues.

The Role of Social Networks

In addition to close personal relationships, the wider social networks we inhabit—from work, community, and the online world—can have a major impact on our mental health. Interacting with different groups of people is good for us. It allows us to engage in interesting conversations and to express ourselves in ways that strengthen our identities. Being around a mix of people, even in an online space, opens us up to new ideas and different ways of thinking.

The Importance of Seeking Support

In hard times, it may feel like the best thing to do is to pull away. But asking for help is an all-but-required step on the path to feeling better. Having friends and family members around to help you through a rough stretch has been shown to make the stretch less rough and way more bearable, enabling you to get back to doing life as you like it. Getting support is a huge part of the process as it provides you with validation, perspective and practical help.

Building Meaningful Relationships

Nurturing significant relationships necessitates work and purpose. Here are a few ways to make those connections with people even tighter:

1. Be Vulnerable. Opening up and expressing your thoughts and feelings fosters a kind of intimacy and trust that comes from shared vulnerability. Vulnerability can deepen connections and encourage others to share their experiences.
2. Spend Time. Relationships flourish due to cumulative moments. So, it's necessary to put aside time for friends and family, whether through catch-ups, cooperative endeavours, or simply being around in hard times.
3. Do Active Listening. Listening is a crucial component of effective communication. It is much more than just taking in a message. The listener must understand and appreciate what the speaker is saying. Show a sincere interest in others' lives and create a supportive space where they can share with you.
4. Become Part of the Community. Engaging in community events or groups can widen your social circle.
5. Be Supportive. Reciprocity is crucial in partnerships.

Conclusion

You can't overstate how powerful a connection is. Profoundly affecting mental health, friendships, family ties, and social networks provide essential support during life's challenges. If you want to boost your emotional resilience then seek help and nurture even more the meaningful relationships in your life. In a world that often seems to encourage isolation, remember that there is real power in connection.



SUCCESSFUL VOLUNTEER TRAINING AT THE COUCH

Over two enriching weekends, our volunteers at The Couch participated in an extensive training program designed to enhance their skills and deepen their understanding of the core of our mission – psychoeducation.

With a focus on equipping them to be effective advocates for mental health and well-being, these weekends laid the foundation for their future contributions to the practice.

The first weekend covered essential areas including marketing, social media, and the ethical and HPCSA (Health Professions Council of South Africa) guidelines on marketing. Volunteers gained insights into how to promote psychoeducational content in a responsible manner that aligns with industry standards, ensuring that the information shared is both accurate and respectful.

The second weekend focused on psychoeducation itself, with practical training on how to write impactful psychoeducational articles that break down complex psychological concepts into accessible, relatable content. Volunteers also learned how to support the behind-the-scenes workings of our practice, such as managing appointments and ensuring smooth operations, all while reinforcing The Couch culture of compassion and professionalism.

By the end of the two weekends, our volunteers were not only equipped with a comprehensive skill set but also aligned with our primary goal—spreading psychoeducation in meaningful ways. Their dedication and new expertise will play a pivotal role in advancing the mission of The Couch and supporting mental well-being in the community. We look forward to seeing their continued growth and the positive impact they will bring.



Understanding Down Syndrome



“Down Syndrome Isn’t A Burden, How People React To It Is”- Stephanie Holland

By Zandile Tshuma
BA (HONS), UNISA

Down Syndrome (DS) is a genetic disorder in which a person has an extra chromosome 21. Individuals with Down syndrome (DS) are profoundly affected by the presence of an extra chromosome, which influences their cognitive and physical development. They often face challenges in expressive language, memory, executive functioning, and motor coordination.

Additionally, individuals with DS may experience issues within their musculoskeletal, neurological, and cardiovascular systems.

Despite certain physical traits, they face higher risks for congenital conditions, including heart defects, vision and hearing impairments, as well as hypothyroidism and mental health disorders, all of which require ongoing support and care.

The prevalence of Down Syndrome in South Africa has often gone unrecognized, particularly due to disparities in healthcare access for low- and middle-income households. Moreover, due to the inequality in access to healthcare, children with Down syndrome often lack access to early interventions that can treat their condition. This lack of access can lead to the development of untreatable mental and physical conditions in adulthood, ultimately affecting their quality of life. Thus, increasing advocacy and awareness is essential to address the inequalities in healthcare access for individuals with Down Syndrome.

The lack of knowledge about the genetic disorder in black communities has resulted in children born with Down Syndrome to experience stigmatisation and discrimination because of their appearance which is different from what is “normal”. Subsequently, their parents also face judgement from people who label them as being “cursed” and blame them for their child’s disorder. As a result, parents often abandon, neglect, or isolate their children from people because of shame they will bring to the family.

Despite challenges, individuals with Down Syndrome achieve remarkable success in sports, entertainment, and academics. Through access to education, people living with the condition are able to be in careers that would not have open for them a century ago.

Sheri Brynard is an inspiring individual who has redefined what it means to live with Down Syndrome. She is the first person in the world with Down Syndrome to be a qualified teacher without receiving special need education. Through her motivational work she strives to change people’s perceptions about the genetic disorder, and encourages young people with disabilities to achieve their dreams.

Furthermore, Ana Victoria Espino’s became the first lawyer with Down Syndrome, without attending a special needs school, and seeks to advocate for people with disabilities.

The achievements of the two women have emphasized the importance of implementing inclusive education within mainstream schools.. This is important because it will improve the speech, literacy, and numeracy skills for people living with Down Syndrome.

Therefore, this month as we celebrate Down Syndrome Awareness day, let’s advocate for people living with this genetic disorder to break the stigma. Remember that we are more alike than different!



DEAR EVAN HANSEN

*The importance of mental
health representation in media*

*Jocelyn Chinniah
(B.A. Psychology
undergraduate student, UJ)*

'Dear Evan Hansen' opened its Johannesburg leg of their South African tour on the 15th of March 2025. The plays tell the story of socially anxious teen, Evan Hansen who attempts to find his place in the world. The play begins with Evan being given the task to write motivational letters to himself as a form of therapy, letting himself know that it will be a good day and why. Self-penned therapeutic journaling and the writing of traumatic or stressful events have noted psychological benefits (Pennebaker, 1997, 2018; Baikie & Wilhelm, 2005).



REFERENCES CAN BE PROVIDED



'Dear Evan Hansen' delves into themes such as suicide prevention and the importance of mental health. One of the main characters, Connor Murphy, commits suicide early on in the play which subsequently influences Evan's trajectory as a character as Connor is found with one of Evan's notes to himself. Evan creates a lie of how him and Connor were friends which spirals out of control, leading him to create an online forum where people share their own struggles in honor of Connor's memory. Various studies support the assumption that media portrayals can promote prosocial messages about mental distress, dispel stigma and encourage people to access support (Henderson, 2017).

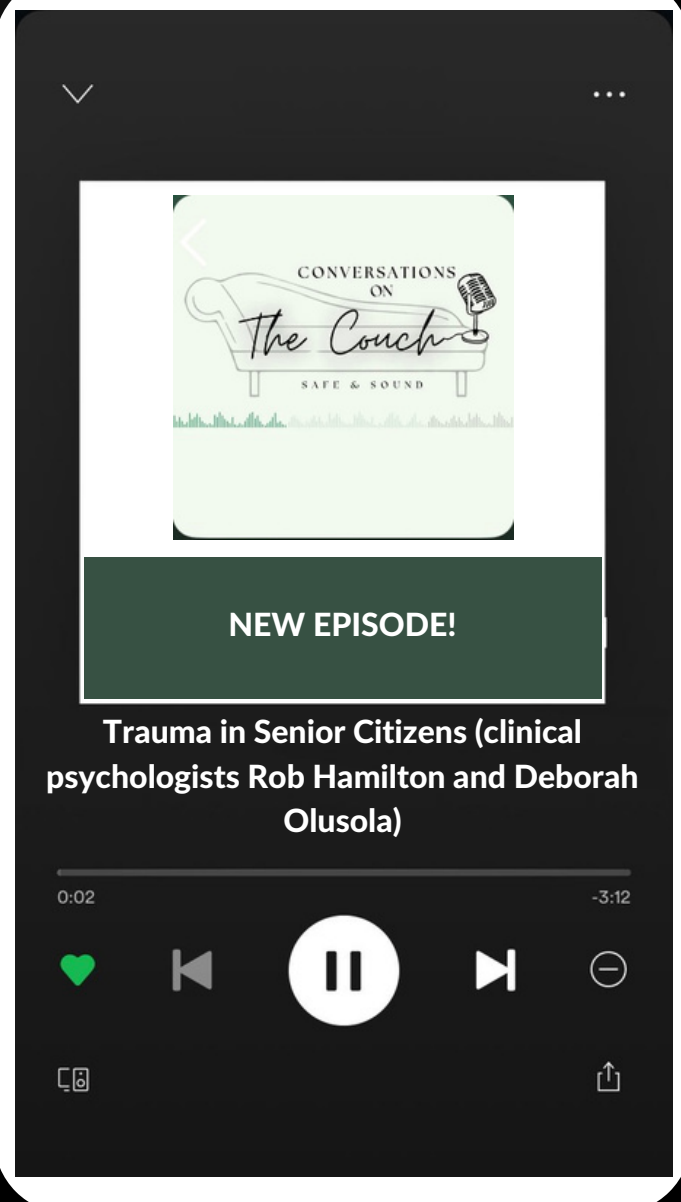
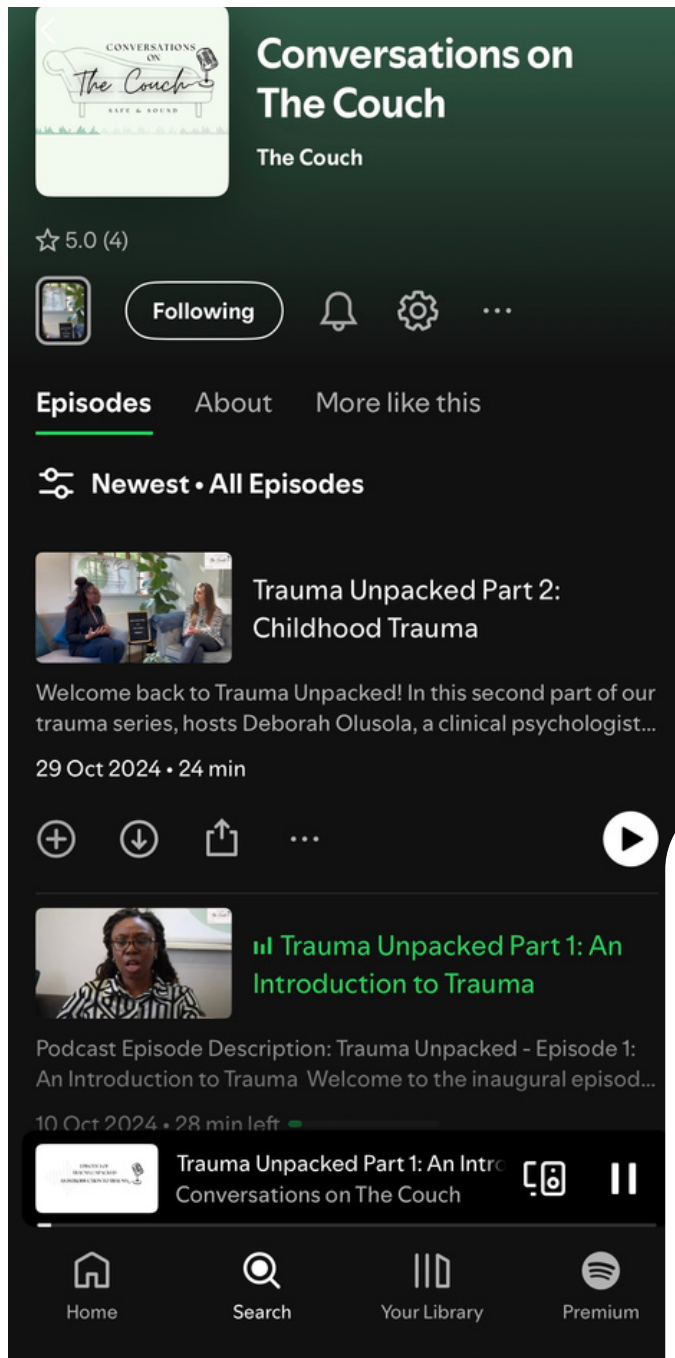
'Dear Evan Hansen' has utilized social media globally by using one of the most popular songs in the play 'You will be found', and turning it into a hashtag, #youwillbefound. The song sends a message that anyone struggling with their mental health should reach out for help. Similarly, the hashtag that has grown quite popular online has given audience members a chance to share their own stories and struggles and receive support from a community that has been created in honor of the play (Lewis, 2022). Many media portrayals of mental health can be negative and contribute to the topic of mental health being seen as 'taboo' and stigmatized within society (Henderson, 2018). However, 'Dear Evan Hansen' approaches the topic of mental health with an interest in relatability. Side characters such as Alana and Jared provide an alternate understanding of what someone struggling with their mental health could look like.



Alana and Jared are two characters who in contrast to Connor Murphy's hostility and Evan Hansen's anxious avoidance, approach their mental health in terms of overcompensating through their humor and sarcasm throughout the play (Lewis, 2022). These alternate representations of mental health are important to understand that although people may not seem like they are struggling physically, that there is always the chance that they are just better at hiding it. 'Dear Evan Hansen' brings to light the questions of mental health that are often overlooked. Questions that help people empathize with people that have social anxiety such as Evan, as most of the play is told through his perspective and the importance of being given the space to speak freely about mental health problems.

Update your
2025 playlist.

TUNE INTO
CONVERSATIONS
on
The Couch



Vicarious Trauma in the Digital Age

Vicarious trauma occurs when people develop trauma symptoms after exposure to others' distressing experiences, often through media. Research shows that those who watched over six hours of media coverage after the Boston Marathon bombings reported higher stress than those at the event (Holman et al., 2014). This highlights how indirect trauma exposure can affect mental health.

Psychological Effects of Online War Exposure

Constant exposure to war content online can cause anxiety, depression, and PTSD. De Jong et al. (2003) found that indirect exposure to war resulted in high rates of depression (67.7%), anxiety (72.2%), and PTSD (42%). This shows the serious mental health impact of witnessing war from a distance.

The Role of Empathy and Action

While digital platforms raise awareness, they also highlight our limited ability to create change, leading to helplessness. However, this awareness can foster empathy and collective action. Supporting communities, signing petitions, and advocating for change can provide a sense of purpose and help those affected.



Coping Strategies

- Limit Media Consumption: Set boundaries on conflict-related content.
- Open Discussions: Talk about your feelings with trusted people.
- Self-Care: Engage in relaxing activities like exercise or meditation.
- Seek Help: If anxiety or depression persists, consult a mental health professional.

Fostering Global Awareness

Being informed about global conflicts is important, but approaching it with sensitivity fosters empathy and understanding. Recognizing shared humanity encourages meaningful action and deeper connection.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF WITNESSING WAR ONLINE

By Anovuyo Ntebe, BA Psychology Student (UJ)



NAVIGATING COLLECTIVE TRAUMA AND FOSTERING EMPATHY

In our digitally connected world, conflicts and wars like the Israel-Palestine, Russia-Ukraine

M23 DRC, Sudan Civil Unrest unfold in real-time across social media platforms and news outlets, bringing the harsh realities of war into our daily lives. This constant exposure, even from a distance, can profoundly affect our mental health, leading to what psychologists term vicarious trauma.

Conclusion

The digital age has turned us into global spectators, witnessing wars unfold in real-time. While this can cause vicarious trauma, adopting coping strategies and engaging in positive action can protect mental health and contribute to meaningful change.

Thank you for being a part of our Couch Community. Stay tuned for our next newsletter - the April 2025 edition of the Psychology Couch Newsletter.

Until next time, as always, our wish for you is to heal, learn, and grow.

Get involved and stay in touch via our social media platforms:

 @the_psychology_couch	 @The Psychology Couch	 The Couch	 @The Couch .(Practice of Psychology and Psychiatry).
 @the_psychology_couch	 011 234 0741	 admin@thepsychologycouch.com	 www.thepsychologycouch.com

