



June 2026 Newsletter

Welcome to the June Amazing Ageing Psychology Newsletter

The leaves have fallen and the cold weather has well and truly arrived. At this time of year, and perhaps particularly given the current state of the world, I have found myself reflecting on how we manage worry. Worry is, of course, a normal human response to uncertainty. At times, it can help us prepare, solve problems, or respond thoughtfully to challenges. However, worry can also become persistent and exhausting, particularly when situations feel beyond our control. Many older adults carry concerns about health, financial pressures, loneliness, world events, and the wellbeing of family members. Care staff and health professionals are often managing similar worries while also supporting others. In difficult periods, it becomes increasingly important to recognise the difference between helpful concern and chronic worry, and to find ways of remaining psychologically grounded despite uncertainty.

I hope you find something useful in this month's newsletter.

Warm regards,

Book Review

When the Brain Sounds the Alarm

Although published several years ago, this month I revisited *Rewire Your Anxious Brain* (Pittman & Karle, 2015) a practical, accessible book that explores the neuroscience of fear, anxiety, and worry. One of the strengths of the book is its explanation of the different processes involved in anxiety, including the role of the brain's threat/warning system, namely the amygdala, and the contribution of thinking patterns that can maintain worry over time.

The early chapters provide a helpful overview of the nature of anxiety and the neuroscience underlying fear and stress responses, while the later chapters provide practical suggestions for managing these responses. I particularly appreciated the chapters exploring common thinking patterns associated with worry, and the ways we can begin to change these. The chapter on relaxation and meditation strategies was also useful and includes sections on progressive muscular and imagery-based relaxation exercises. The book emphasises that sleep and physical exercise also play a critical role in calming the nervous system and reducing ongoing stress.

I would highly recommend this book to anyone struggling with anxiety, fear or persistent worry who would like to better understand these experiences and to begin trying out some of the practical strategies to help manage them.

Further information about *Rewire your Anxious Brain* can be found on the [New Harbinger Publications website](#).

Reference: Pittman, C. M., & Karle, E. M. (2015) *Rewire Your Anxious Brain: How to use the neuroscience of fear to end anxiety, panic and worry*. New Harbinger Press.



Clinical Insight

When Worry Becomes a Habit of Mind

In my experience, worry in later life is not always linked to just one specific problem. Rather, it gradually becomes a habitual way of thinking and responding to uncertainty in life, that is, a habit of mind. Concerns about health, family members, finances, world events, or future care needs can accumulate over time, leaving people feeling mentally exhausted and constantly “on alert.” For some individuals, worry can also give the illusion of control, such that worrying about something can become perceived as “doing something” about it. Although, worry often increases distress rather than reducing it.

It's helpful to distinguish between productive concern and repetitive worry. Productive concern may lead to practical steps like problem-solving or seeking help. Chronic worry, however, often involves repeatedly thinking through the same concerns without reaching any resolution, like a dog chasing its tail.

Becoming more aware of these patterns and starting to use practical strategies can help reduce the nervous system's ongoing state of arousal. Helpful strategies include: - relaxation, structured routines, social connection, questioning thoughts and thought patterns, and physical exercise. Limiting excessive exposure to distressing news can also help.

For older adults living in residential aged care, worries tend to become focused on everyday aspects of care and daily life. Concerns about loss of function and independence, changes in

health, unfamiliar routines, relationships with staff or other residents, and uncertainty about the future all contribute to ongoing anxiety. This anxiety can sometimes trigger depression and behaviours of concern such as repetitive questions or frequent calling or buzzing for reassurance.

Some residents also worry about being a burden to family members or about losing opportunities for meaningful connections. This can lead to loneliness. Empathic communication, regular reassurance, and consistent relationship-centred care all play an important role in reducing distress and helping residents feel safer and more understood.



Research Spotlight

A large international study, known as the KIND Challenge Intervention, (Lim et al. 2025) explored whether small “acts of kindness” could improve wellbeing.

In this study, “acts of kindness” were defined as practical actions such as checking on and helping neighbours, sharing information, volunteering, or maintaining regular social contact. Importantly, the intervention encouraged people to take practical steps to actively connect with others in their neighbourhood.

Anxiety and worry sometimes lead people to withdraw from social activities and avoid contact with others. In contrast, the intervention activities in this study encouraged participants to simply engage

with their neighbours, offer support, volunteer, and maintain regular social contact.

What I found particularly compelling was the nature of the activities involved. Rather than relying on formal therapeutic programmes or professional support, participants were encouraged to take simple steps to connect with and support people in their local community. These activities are akin to therapeutic approaches such as behavioural activation and exposure.

Australian participants reported significantly lower levels of social anxiety and stress following the four-week intervention. The findings suggest that small “acts of kindness” may help strengthen community relationships and reduce social anxiety and stress. For people struggling with worry or anxiety, small steps towards connection may be more powerful than they first appear.

If you would like to try some of these ideas yourself, I have developed a free checklist, Small Steps Towards Connection, inspired by the KIND Challenge intervention. Click [here](#) to download the checklist.

Reference:

Lim, M. H., Hennessey, A., Qualter, P., Smith, B., Thurston, L., Eres, R., & Holt-Lunstad, J. (2025). The KIND Challenge community intervention to reduce loneliness and social isolation, improve mental health, and neighbourhood relationships: an international randomized controlled trial. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 60:931–942. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-024-02740-z>

Quote of the month

“We suffer more often in imagination than in reality”

Seneca, Letter 13, On Groundless Fears

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