

NPATS

Northern Psychological Assessment & Treatment Service

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Ho Ho Ho.....Oh No No No....Christmas is coming!

Christmas is often a time of high stress and anxiety. Have you ever wondered why? Why do some people behave so erratically at this time of the year? It's like, they feel like it's the last Christmas ever. Have we been subconsciously programmed to act this way? Has social media and endless advertising infiltrated the psyche so much that we become so focused on purchasing the 'right gift' and hosting the 'best Christmas gathering'? I personally think it is one of the biggest factors.



Can we choose to be different? Absolutely.

The most important thing is to keep things in perspective. If you are buying gifts, try and be balanced about this. Consider your bank balance and stick to a budget. Will everyone like their gift anyway? Who knows! Remember, it's meant to be the thought that counts. If you are having trouble staying grounded, try sparing a thought those in our community who find Christmas quite a lonely and confronting time. You may well work with some of these folks or occasionally encounter them socially, and not be aware of this. For those folks, a seat at the dinner table would be the best present ever.

Additional Tips for managing Christmas:

- Be sensitive to those around you who may not have anyone to celebrate with.
- If you are attending a gathering, keep your level of alcohol consumption low
- Spend a fair amount of time with both sides of the family.
- Try and ensure you have some time for you on XMAS day.
- If you are struggling for company on the day, consider volunteering at a charity.

Lewi Yiolitis, Principal Clinical Psychologist



Virtual Reality (V.R) Assisted Exposure Therapy

Virtual Reality is an innovative technology that creates artificial environments in digital form where the user can experience real-life-like sensations through special means such as helmets, glasses, projectors, and gloves with sensors.

There is a considerable body of evidence that suggests VR assisted exposure therapy, in conjunction with a traditional systematic desensitization approach, enhances the treatment of various phobias, anxiety disorders, and PTSD (Spytska, 2024; Carl, Stein et al, 2019) and is at least as effective as traditional in vivo approaches.

Over the last six months, NPATS has been able to successfully use VR to assist patients with long held phobias such as a fear of flying, heights, escalators, driving in traffic and in tunnels. This has been a more than useful way of bringing as much of a real-life exposure experience to our patients without leaving the office. It has served as a more than useful first step to getting patients back into challenging themselves as we can rehearse the use of coping mechanisms during the exposure in preparation for the real-life experience. Patients are typically set homework, to gradually work up their desensitization hierarchy in between sessions. It has been both exciting and rewarding for both patients and therapists.

Lewi Yiolitis, Principal Clinical Psychologist

NPATS Group Program

Living with a mental health condition can be an isolating, lonely and stigmatising experience. NPATS has been running group programs designed to address these issues for over 15 years. These programs are an adjunct to individual treatment that patients have with their psychologist and is a great way of extending the mental health care that is available to patients.

Over the years we have run both Depression and Depression & Anxiety support groups as well as dedicated in depth therapy groups on Panic & Anxiety and Social Anxiety. Patients are eligible for 10 Medicare rebated group attendances each year. We have also offered a coffee club/games club which was a more informal opportunity for people to connect.

Patients who have attended the groups have benefitted from being able to share their experiences, learn from each other, and continue to work on their individual therapy goals with the support of the group. Feedback from attendees has been very positive.

We will be continuing our group program in 2026 and will be providing additional groups. There is likely to be a coffee/games club, a walking group, self-esteem group and relaxation/meditation group, in addition to the depression and anxiety group and social anxiety group.

Deborah Nielsen, Clinical Psychologist & Group Program Facilitator

Referrals

NPATS continues to accept referrals for new patients. Generally speaking, our referrals are processed within a day and an appointment time provided within four weeks. During busier periods of the year, our psychologists may have a slightly longer wait time.

Our new intake and screening protocol has seen NPATS streamline our services as best as possible and provide assistance as promptly as possible to those most in need.

For referring GP's and psychiatrists we welcome your contact to discuss (even briefly) your patient's needs and aim to meet all reasonable expectations of both doctors and their patients. If we are unable to assist you within a necessary time frame, we are more than happy to direct you to other experienced psychologists (if possible) or services to meet your patient's needs. We are also happy to provide suggestions for doctors to best manage their patient's mental health needs whilst they are waiting for their psychologist appointment.