# Teaching Psychology in an Age of TikTok

## February 11, 2026

## Key Takeaways

- **About 60% of TikTok's top mental health tips were rated inaccurate.**
Lori Santos shared a Guardian analysis that found the majority of highly viewed mental health advice on TikTok was not just "a little misleading," but inaccurate. Pathologized normal emotions. Misused therapeutic language. Anecdotes framed as evidence.

And yet, TikTok is not the enemy. It is a tool. Santos showed how students can be trained not just to consume science, but to communicate it. One of her students reached half a million viewers with evidence-based psychology content.

- **The harder we chase happiness, the worse we may feel.**
June Gruber presented research showing that the relationship between happiness and well-being follows an inverted U-curve. Past a certain point, intensely valuing happiness is linked to more depression, more symptoms of mania, and lower actual happiness.

What works instead? Emotional diversity. Experiencing a range of positive and negative emotions is associated with lower depression, lower anxiety, and even reduced inflammation.

- **Students are not gullible. They are developmentally primed.**
Vanessa Rainey reframed the misinformation problem through a developmental lens. Identity formation + dualistic thinking + algorithmic personalization creates the perfect environment for pop psychology to stick.

"Skepticism is not a personality trait. It's a developmental achievement." This means it's teachable!

- **Curiosity beats correction.**
Kendra Thomas shared a simple classroom shift: replace "Does anyone have questions?" with "What are you more curious about now?" The result? More engagement, better questions, and deeper student thinking.

### Five Practical Teaching Tips:

1. **Have students fact-check TikTok psychology claims against peer-reviewed research.**
2. **Teach the WOOP method (Wish, Outcome, Obstacle, Plan) as an evidence-based alternative to manifesting.**
3. **Model intellectual humility: "Here's where the research is strong, and here's where it's still emerging."**
4. **Explicitly explain algorithmic personalization so students understand the illusion of consensus.**
5. **Anchor assignments in purpose beyond self-optimization. Most students want to help people, not just optimize themselves.**

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