

Managing Stress, Worry and Overwhelm

Everyone experiences stress and a certain amount of stress can be good as it can mobilise us into action and enhance our performance. Stress is a normal reaction to feeling under pressure, or when something threatens our sense of stability and safety. When we start to worry about things, we can feel tense and uptight, our heart can pound and we can feel overwhelmed or that we can't manage.

However, when our stress level is too high, it can get in the road of what we need to do, making us ineffective, cranky, and unable to see things clearly or in perspective. Stress can stop us doing the things that would help us.

Stressors for students can include:

- Meeting assignment deadlines and exams over the semester
- Juggling the responsibilities of studying, working, and family
- Financial pressure
- Having things go wrong in your life
- Change and uncertainty
- Worrying about the future
- Difficulties within the family, with friends, or in study groups.

So what can you do?

1. Take a breath and step back. Notice how you're reacting and what's happening. Knowing you're stressed and stepping back from stress are different. Stepping back gives you some space between you and what is stressful.
2. Think damage control. Don't do things that feed the stress or make it worse. Take note if what you are doing is helping or not. For example; is talking about things helping at this moment, or are you going round in circles. It's okay to have negative thoughts and worries, just don't feed them.
3. Release the stress by taking a break, doing something physical or talking to someone.
4. Organise, prioritise, plan, and act. When we are stressed, our emotion takes over and it's hard to think. Put things on paper, do a mind map, write lists and action steps, even if they are small. This can help to contain the stress and helps when your mind is carrying lots of things.
5. Take small steps. Your ability to act is reduced when you are too stressed. A small step towards what you want gets things started and helps you to engage your resources.
6. Do things that calm. When we get stressed our system gets over activated. Relaxation exercises are a great way to reduce stress, calm down and bring some piece of mind to both body and mind.
 - Breathe slower. Try softening, deepening and lengthening your breath. Remember a comfortable breath is more effective than a forced one.

- Practice some form of relaxation exercise. For example, if any part of your body is tense, tighten it and then release the muscles quickly. Repeat this to or three times until the tenseness is replaced by a feeling of relaxation.
 - Try some stretching exercises such as yoga or tai chi.
 - Concentrate on the here and now, rather than the big picture.
 - Exercise – movement is a great way to release tension and clear your mind.
7. Get adequate sleep – 7 -8 hours is best.
 8. Eat well. Limit your intake of sugar, coffee and alcohol. Eat a nutritious breakfast, lunch and dinner every day.
 9. Get some 'me' time. Do small things that you enjoy. For example: listening to music, or having a laugh with someone. Learn to say NO. Don't try to be perfect, or try to be responsible for everyone else.
 10. Ask for and accept help. Let your teachers know if you are struggling with things that are affecting your studies. Talk to people who are there to help you. For example: Student Support Services, Learning Support, your doctor, or mental health professional.