



TUS Midlands Student Counselling Service Newsletter

Newsletter Content

Navigating Anxiety in University

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- Understanding Anxiety, Worry, and Avoidance and Helpful Techniques



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Navigating Anxiety in University: Q & A with Student Counsellor Deirdre Wynne

What are some common sources of anxiety for university students?

Some of the common sources of anxiety for university students can be a culmination of many factors.

- academic pressure -exams/presentations/study
- transitions of moving away from home and increased responsibility
- loneliness and struggling to make friends
- managing finances/time
- peer pressure
- unmet expectations that students have of themselves, or they believe others have of them.

How can students identify triggers for anxiety in their own lives?

Identifying your triggers can be a process but there are things to do to support this. Journal on how you're feeling and reflect on this being aware of how the environment and interactions of the week impacted you. What are the major stressors in your life – what brings up an emotional reaction and is there a pattern in your life relating to this? Finally, reflecting on your own past experiences can help identify triggers.

What role does time management play in reducing anxiety, and do you have any strategies for effective time management?

Time management is essential in reducing anxiety. Without it, there is a probability of overwhelm, emotional distress, or even burnout. It can help you achieve your goals by prioritising what tasks need to be completed. This will reduce stress and have a positive impact on self-confidence.

Strategies include – Setting realistic goals. Make a clear plan of what needs to get done. Prioritise the tasks – break them down if you need to. If your assignment is due next week then write three hundred words per day. Setting a plan in motion will eliminate procrastinating. Factor in some chill time to spend with friends or watch a movie. Ensure time for eating and getting rest.

What steps can students take to prevent anxiety from negatively impacting their academic performance?

I would encourage students to see anxiety as a normal part of life. Talk to your friends and classmates, as if you are not alone in feeling this way. Reach out to your lecturers if you don't understand something in class – they are there to help. Try to get into a supportive structure/routine for your week and this will positively impact you academically, emotionally, and physically. Remember you are on a learning journey – you are not supposed to know everything.

Understanding Anxiety, Worry, and Avoidance and Helpful Techniques

Anxiety

Anxiety can be both a state and a trait, meaning that some of us feel anxious mainly in response to certain situations, while some of us can be naturally more predisposed to anxiety. (*The Oxford Review Encyclopaedia of Terms*)

Generalised anxiety disorder is differently described as excessive worry about everyday situations and issues. (*John Hopkins Medicine*)

Worry and Avoidance

When dealing with anxiety two popular coping mechanisms are worry or avoidance. Unfortunately, neither of these are very effective. Worrying involves excessively focusing on potential negative outcomes or future events, often without a clear solution. While it may provide temporary relief, it tends to lead to a cycle of unproductive rumination.

Avoidance, on the other hand, involves actively avoiding situations or triggers that cause anxiety. While it may provide immediate relief, it can reinforce fear and prevent people from facing and overcoming their anxiety in a healthy and sustainable way.

Helpful Techniques

Practice Deep Breathing: Deep breathing exercises can help activate the body's relaxation response and reduce anxiety. Take slow, deep breaths, focusing on the sensation of the breath entering and leaving your body.



Challenge Negative Thoughts: Identify and challenge negative or irrational thoughts that contribute to anxiety. Ask yourself if there is evidence to support these thoughts and consider alternative perspectives.



Set Realistic Goals and Prioritise Tasks: Break down tasks into smaller, manageable steps and set realistic goals. Prioritise your tasks based on importance and tackle them one at a time to avoid feeling overwhelmed.

Engage in Regular Physical Movement: Physical activity has been shown to reduce anxiety and improve mood. Find an activity that you enjoy and incorporate it into your routine.

Establish a Healthy Sleep Routine: Lack of sleep can worsen anxiety symptoms. Aim for a consistent sleep schedule, create a calming bedtime routine, and ensure your sleep environment is comfortable.



Speak to yourself as you would speak to a loved one: How do you think things might change if you responded to yourself in the same way you typically respond to a close friend when they are suffering? Responding to yourself in the same way you respond to a close friend can lead to greater self-care, emotional well-being, and personal growth. It can transform your inner dialogue, fostering self-compassion and empowering you to navigate life's challenges with kindness and understanding.

Remember that managing anxiety is a process, and different strategies may work for different individuals. It's important to find what works best for you and be patient with yourself.

Podcast Recommendation

Dr. Andrew Huberman -The Huberman Lab, episode 10,
Tools for Managing Stress & Anxiety

Togetherall

Learn more about anxiety on togetherall.com through connecting with others, courses and resources.