

Everything You Ever Needed to
Know About Coping With Student
Life, But Were Afraid to Ask

Psychologist Recommended Strategies to Cope With:

Stress

Depression

Sleep Problems

Procrastination

Test Anxiety

Panic Attacks

Anger

Lack of Assertiveness

Perfectionism

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Introduction

This booklet was written to provide students, faculty, advisors and staff within various academic settings (i.e., colleges and universities), a succinct yet comprehensive presentation of many common psychological issues that students struggle with as they face the challenges of their academic years. These materials will focus both on how to identify these psychological issues and on successful strategies that can be applied on a self-help basis, to cope with or overcome these concerns. The issues that are addressed in this booklet are considered to be some of the most common issues that are addressed within a university or college counselling setting, and which are most amenable to a self-help type format. This booklet includes information on the following student concerns: stress and anxiety, depression, sleep problems, procrastination, test anxiety, panic attacks, anger, lack of assertiveness and perfectionism.

Any of the above issues could be addressed by students through a counselling process, and often are, but many students prefer to deal with these kinds of life issues on their own. If not on their own, many students would find it easier to discuss these kinds of concerns with a friend, family member, residence coordinator, faculty advisor or another trusted person rather than a counsellor or psychologist. As a result, this information is not only helpful for students who are struggling with these problems, but for any individual who interacts with these students and wants to help from a place of knowledge to make the support more helpful.

Of course, information alone does not produce change in a student's life. The strategies in this booklet need to be applied, often on a consistent basis, to see meaningful results. Students who have already applied these coping strategies consistently have been able to make significant positive changes in their lives, making their overall university/college experience exciting, rewarding and appropriately challenging, rather than frustrating, stressful and overwhelming.

More so today than at probably any other time, successfully coping with college or university life has become very difficult. Students no longer need to cope with only the demands of their studies, but also have to face many new challenges due to our changing economy, changing social structures and our highly competitive learning environments. Out of necessity, students frequently have to work one or more jobs to pay for their ever-increasing tuitions. Many students are not getting the financial or emotional support they need, due to more and more families that are fragmented by separations and divorce. Demands on students for high grades to get into certain faculties or graduate schools are skyrocketing, since so many students today are seeking out post-secondary training. These changes and many others, too lengthy to mention here, have significantly contributed to the psychological issues addressed in this booklet.

This is the information that students need to know to be successful in university or college, but were afraid to ask.

STRESS

Identification:

There are many and varied stressors unique to and imbedded within the college or university experience. Living, in fact, is inherently stressful but how we manage it will determine the number and severity of the stress related symptoms we experience. Many people do not recognize the symptoms or choose to ignore them. Stress related symptoms can be broken down into four major categories. These include:

1. **Emotional**

- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Anger
- Depression

2. **Cognitive**

- Difficulties concentrating
- Memory problems
- Confusion

3. **Physical**

- Sleep disturbance
- Fatigue
- Headaches
- Change in appetite
- Muscle tension
- Gastrointestinal problems
- Weight change
- Decreased sexual interest

4. **Behavioral**

- Increased substance (i.e., alcohol, drug) use
- Social isolation
- Conflict with others

These symptoms are your body's way of telling you something is wrong and you need to pay attention to them. Symptoms that are ignored ultimately lead to much more serious health problems, including: hypertension, cardiovascular disease, tension or migraine headaches, ulcers, asthma, diabetes, cancer, irritable bowel syndrome, multiple sclerosis and eczema. To reduce both stress related symptoms and the chances of developing these more serious stress related disorders, try the following strategies.

Coping Strategies:

1. Diaphragmatic Breathing

When we are under stress, we tend to breathe more quickly and more shallowly. Fortunately, we have control over our rate of breathing and when we take slow, deep, diaphragmatic breaths, we will induce the relaxation response in our body. If you are doing diaphragmatic breathing correctly, you will notice your abdomen rising and falling with each breath. If you notice instead that your chest is rising and falling more than your abdomen, you are reducing the efficiency of your breathing. Breathe in to the count of five and out to the count of five, and you will begin to feel a sense of relaxation fill your mind and your body.

2. Learn Other Relaxation Skills

Aside from diaphragmatic breathing, there are many other skills one can learn to relax. These include progressive muscle relaxation, autogenic training, deep muscle relaxation, imagery training, biofeedback, and self-hypnosis. If you want to learn these techniques, talk to a counsellor/psychologist at Student Counselling Services (or the counselling service on your campus) for assistance.

3. Develop A Calming Focus

Focus on something in your immediate environment that is pleasant, beautiful, or calming. This could be something visual such as a painting, tree, or flower, or it could be something that stimulates your other senses such as a pleasant smell or taste. Allow yourself to fully experience whatever it is you are focusing on.

4. Develop A Positive Filter

A lot of stress is created by unknowingly focusing on all of the negativity in the world around you and in your own life. However, on a daily basis, you can begin to train yourself to look for the positive. This could involve doing an inventory each day of what went right, rather than focusing on the problems you have encountered or mistakes you have made.

5. Avoid Stimulants

There are several substances that, on a physiological level, actually stimulate the stress response in our body. Two of the most commonly used stimulants are caffeine and nicotine. If stress is an issue for you, then reducing or eliminating these substances from your body would go a long way toward reducing your stress level.

6. Be Realistic About What You Can And Cannot Control

A great deal of stress can be created in one's life by either trying to control events or other people we cannot control. The first step in reducing this source of stress is to

determine whether the stressor is under your control or not. If it is not, learn to accept it rather than experience the frustration that inevitably follows if you try to change it. On the other hand, if it is controllable, devise and execute a plan to overcome it.

7. Develop More Realistic Self-Talk And Positive Affirmations

What we say to ourselves has a profound impact on our level of stress and our perceived ability to cope with it. Look for evidence for the accuracy of your present self-talk and change those aspects of it that are based on fear or anxiety rather than fact. Replace it with more rational self-statements and/or practice daily positive affirmations.

8. Live In The Present

Much stress is created by living in the past or worrying about the future. Develop a "one-day-at-a-time" mind set, since we can only really control the present anyway. Think each morning how you can make this the best day of your life despite any circumstances that may be challenging. Since none of us knows when our last day is coming, we have to live as if each day could be our last.

9. Keep A Journal

Instead of keeping all your feelings and thoughts inside, which can lead to a constant state of worry, express them in a journal which will provide a sense of relief and may serve as the first step in a more problem-solving process to deal with the underlying issues.

10. Use Humor

Laughter is considered one of the best medicines for stress. Actively seek out humorous books, TV shows, movies or life situations that will bring humor into your life. Do not be afraid to laugh at yourself and your mistakes, rather than dwell on these and create misery in your life. Be creative to get your daily fix of laughter.

11. Get Support

Research indicates that one of the best ways to combat stress is to develop and rely on a support system. Whether this be family, relatives, friends, other students, or faculty, the opportunity to talk to any of these people is a great way to minimize our stress. Do not be reluctant to open up, since this is how we develop connection with the people around us and solidify our support system. Lack of connection will undoubtedly lead to feelings of loneliness and increase our overall stress level.

12. Watch Your Diet

Although most people today realize that our diet has a big impact on our physical health, fewer people are aware of how much it affects our resistance to stress. Eating a healthy and well balanced diet is like giving ourselves an immunity to stress.

13. Take A Holiday In Your Mind

Although taking a real holiday is a great potential stress reducer, it is not always possible, especially in the middle of a hectic schedule. Instead, take a short (i.e., 1 to 5 minute) vacation in your head. Imagine any scene that you find relaxing, or any place you have been that is accompanied by positive memories. Try to bring each of your five senses (i.e., sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch) into the image to increase your level of relaxation.

14. Let Go Of Perfectionism

Trying to be perfect or do a perfect job is a sure recipe for stress. Realistic goals will still allow you a sense of achievement but will also give you room to make mistakes, which are inevitable anyway.

15. Manage Your Time

A major source of stress today for many people, particularly students, is being over-committed with little time available for rest and relaxation. Developing a reasonable schedule, which includes both productive activity and fun or relaxing activities, can significantly reduce stress. Develop a list of activities that you need to accomplish and prioritize these. Realize that studying all the time without adequate breaks is not the most effective strategy to get high marks and is a sure recipe for stress.

16. Exercise Or Become Physically Active

Exercise and other physical activity can both significantly reduce stress and prevent the negative effects of stress. The range of activities that are beneficial are endless and include such things as walking, running, cycling, swimming, dancing, skiing, gardening, weight training, hiking, and any number of team sports. Exercise causes the release of endorphins into our blood stream, which produces a natural "high" that leaves us calmer and less stressed.

17. Minimize Competition

It is hard to avoid the competitiveness of the world today, particularly within the university climate. However, to experience less stress and greater satisfaction with your university experience, try to develop a mind-set where you focus on the joy of learning rather than competition for high marks. If you can find this type of satisfaction, it is likely that your marks will in turn improve anyway.

18. Find Solitude

Given all the pressures of university life, time on your own can be an important strategy to manage your stress. This is particularly true if your day is filled with a lot of contact with other people. Alone time can be used for relaxation, as a time to reflect on your life, or as an opportunity to do solitary hobbies or physical activities.

19. Confront Life Problems Rather Than Ignore Them

As a short-term solution to stress, many people simply try to ignore life problems. Unfortunately, problems ignored tend to exacerbate over time until a solution is found. Problem-solving is a skill that definitely develops with practice, so refine your skill.

20. Be Assertive

Learning to openly and honestly express your feelings, values, and beliefs in a way that respects the rights of others can be a big stress reducer. In particular, this applies if you have difficulties saying no to other people and become overwhelmed with tasks that you do not really want to take on.

21. Slow Down Your Life

As society's pace continues to increase, you can decide to step back and slow down the pace of your life. Research indicates that as the pace of our life increases, our productivity and enjoyment decrease and our life stress increases. Slowing down can actually increase our performance and enjoyment of the work we do.

22. Establish Realistic Goals

Live in the present but plan for the future. Writing out both short and long-term goals that are realistic and meaningful can reduce a lot of stress by making you more purposeful and productive. The alternative, which is to procrastinate, leads to high levels of stress.

23. Cry

Allowing yourself to express some tears when you are emotionally upset can be a great release and a big stress reducer. Crying is our body's natural mechanism to reduce anxiety and tension, although many people, particularly men, are reluctant to use it. Holding in negative feelings in the long term just does not work.

24. Self-Massage

For many people, stress manifests itself as muscle tension in their body. One strategy to reduce this tension is to massage yourself if you cannot find someone else to do it for you. Focus on the neck, shoulders, and face since much of our stress accumulates in these muscle groups and will ultimately lead to pain if not attended to. Use either firm circular or back and forth motions with your fingers on these muscle groups.

25. Stretch

Stretching is another way to reduce muscle tension in your body and psychologically help you experience a sense of relaxation. Focusing on muscles that are most obviously tight is a good starting point, but you can include your whole body. Just

shaking a part of your body may also be helpful to reduce tension. Taking up yoga may provide you a regular opportunity to enjoy the benefits of stretching and relaxation.

26. Spirituality

For some people developing a more spiritual life, whether this be formalized religion or not, can help reduce stress in a number of ways. Spirituality may help one deal with some of the more existential questions about life. As well, prayer or meditations can have a very relaxing effect on the body.

27. Avoid Alcohol Use

If you are turning to alcohol as a way to reduce the pressure of college or university, realize that it is one of the poorest long-term solutions. Alcohol impairs our ability to problem-solve and ultimately take control of our life issues. Remember, alcohol is also a depressant of the central nervous system and will enhance any depressive feelings we already have.

DEPRESSION

Identification:

Changes in mood are a normal part of the human condition. However, when feelings of sadness or other symptoms of depression are severe, go on for prolonged periods of time, or significantly affect our daily functioning, then we may be suffering from depression. Symptoms of depression can vary a lot from person to person, however, some of the most common symptoms of depression include:

- Sadness
- Sleep disturbance
- Change in appetite
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Difficulties concentrating
- Memory problems
- Decreased sexual interest
- Social withdrawal
- Fatigue
- Excessive worry
- Self-criticism
- Lack of interest in everyday activities
- Suicidal thoughts

Remember that depressive feelings and symptoms are on a continuum and treatment is going to be most successful if it is tailored to your individual situation.

There are many potential ways of coping with depression and reducing depressive symptoms. Here are 30 of the most common and successful strategies.

Coping Strategies:

1. Become aware of the early warning signs that you are getting depressed so that you can apply coping strategies at an early stage in the depressive cycle.
2. Identify and deal with any potential stressors that underlie your depression.
3. Schedule your daily activities so that you maintain a routine.
4. Make a daily list of positive experiences or accomplishments to shift your focus to the positive.
5. Set realistic goals for yourself on a daily basis so that you have a sense of purpose in your life.

6. Avoid sleeping during the day as it will disrupt your sleep cycle.
7. Build enjoyable activities into your daily schedule.
8. Exercise on a regular basis.
9. Rebuild or expand your social circle.
10. Live one day at a time rather than always worrying about the future.
11. Maintain a balanced diet.
12. Learn relaxation skills to reduce your life stress.
13. Keep a journal of your thoughts and feelings.
14. Limit your alcohol consumption since alcohol is a depressant of your central nervous system.
15. Establish a healthy sleep cycle.
16. Listen to your favorite music.
17. Get in touch with your spirituality.
18. Spend time outdoors.
19. Get a pet. It can give you the unconditional support you may be looking for.
20. Develop some new hobbies or return to some old hobbies you previously enjoyed.
21. Stop procrastinating.
22. Develop and use some positive daily affirmations.
23. Bring laughter back into your life through books, TV shows, movies, or other life situations.
24. Get involved in some volunteer work.
25. Learn how to be more assertive.
26. Try using full spectrum lighting if your depression is worse over the winter season.
27. Get some professional counselling. (Drop in or phone your campus counselling service).
28. Go to a depression support group.
29. Talk to staff at the Distress Line (ph. {780} 482-4537).
30. Do a trial on an anti-depressant medication. (See your family doctor or a psychiatrist).

SLEEPING PROBLEMS

Identification:

Difficulty sleeping is a very common problem, particularly for students on campus. The 2001 Student Life Survey indicated that 31% of University of Alberta undergraduate students reported that insomnia interfered with their university studies. Problems sleeping can manifest themselves in a number of different ways including difficulties falling asleep, frequent awakenings during the night, and early morning awakening. On average, adults need 7 to 8 hours of sleep to function at an optimum, but there are significant individual differences in the amount of sleep needed. A good night's sleep is essential to restore our body and our mind.

Remember that it may take 2 to 4 weeks of consistent practice, with the following hints, to experience a significant improvement in your sleep.

Coping Strategies:

1. Control Your Sleep Environment

Creating a healthy sleep environment should include each of the following:

- a) Eliminate noise (i.e., ear plugs, white noise generator). A fan, humidifier, or air conditioner can often serve as a white noise generator.
- b) Reduce room light (i.e., window blinds, eye shades).
- c) Regulate room temperature (i.e., ceiling fan, air conditioning). If you are too warm (above 24° C), you will wake up more often, move more during your sleep, and your deep sleep will be disrupted. Ideal bedroom temperature is 16°C to 18°C.
- d) Have a good supportive mattress. If you wake up stiff or sore, it could be a sign that your mattress and box-spring are not giving adequate support.
- e) Use a humidifier if the air in your room is very dry since warm, moist air often helps us breathe easier.

2. Establish A Bedtime Ritual

Make a ritual out of going to bed by trying to do the same activities in the same order each and every night before you go to bed. Ensure that the routine does not include stimulating activities within an hour before bed. To relax, listen to calm music, have a hot bath, read some "light" material, or listen to relaxation tapes.

3. Set Your Internal Time Clock

Become aware of your own internal time clock and go to bed when you feel tired. However, as much as possible, get up at the same time each and every day of your life (even on weekends). Once your internal clock is set, you should feel sleepy at approximately the same time each night and can then establish a regular bedtime. Getting lots of morning sunlight will also help regulate your sleep-wake cycle.

4. Do Not Stay In Bed

If you have not fallen asleep within 30 minutes, do not stay in bed. Instead, it is much better to get up and do something boring (i.e., read, have a light snack, watch TV, listen to relaxing music).

5. Reserve Your Bed For Sleep And Sex

To form an appropriate association with your sleep environment, sleep researchers recommend you avoid activities other than sleep or sex in your bed. Studying, watching TV, reading, eating, or other activities that require mental activity should be avoided when in bed. Especially avoid late night news programming, violent movies, and arguments with your partner, family or friends.

6. Be Careful About Napping

Napping during the day will usually disrupt your internal time clock and should be avoided. If you must nap, do not do so for longer than 30 minutes and ideally do it at the same time every day. Taking a nap the day after a bad night's sleep will likely only perpetuate your sleep problems.

7. Avoid Stimulants

Avoid stimulants such as caffeine and nicotine, particularly before going to bed. Your last cigarette should be at least 2 to 3 hours before bedtime. Your last cup of coffee should be no later than 6 to 8 hours before bed. Remember, caffeine is also found in many foods or drinks besides coffee, such as soft drinks, chocolate, and certain medications (i.e., Anacin, Midol, Exedrin), including nasal sprays.

Research indicates that smokers generally take more time to fall asleep, awaken more frequently, and tend to experience disrupted, fragmented sleep more often than non-smokers.

8. Avoid Alcohol And Marijuana

Even though alcohol or marijuana may make you more relaxed and therefore you may find it easier to fall asleep, they both disrupt deep sleep and cause more early morning awakening, leaving you less re-energized by your sleep overall.

9. Reduce Your Life Stress

Stress is considered the number one cause of sleep problems in North America. Difficulties managing life stress will usually affect one's sleep pattern. Learning some effective stress management skills would be essential to overcome this source of sleep disturbance.

10. Set Up A Worry Time

If you tend to worry a lot when you go to bed and therefore cannot fall asleep, set up a "worry time" during the day to think about and problem-solve those issues that are keeping you awake. Or, if you go to bed and start worrying, get up, go to a "worry chair", and let yourself worry for 10 to 20 minutes before returning to bed.

11. Use Relaxation Techniques

If you are having difficulties falling asleep, use some relaxation skills (i.e., deep breathing, autogenic training, deep muscle relaxation, progressive muscle relaxation or imagery training) to put yourself into Stage 1 of the sleep cycle, and enhance your chances of a deep sleep. If you are unfamiliar with these techniques, a counsellor/psychologist can help teach you these skills.

12. Focus On Relaxing Images

Focusing on relaxing images tends to stimulate activity in the right hemisphere of our brain, which also coordinates the relaxation response in our body. These images could involve almost anything you find personally relaxing: your favorite place, a trip you were on, a deserted island, or a place you have always dreamed of traveling to.

13. Exercise Regularly

Exercise regularly so your body feels tired when you go to bed. You are more likely to experience deep sleep if you exercise. Do not do strenuous exercises within 3 hours of bedtime however. Exercise increases your core body temperature and sleepiness will only set in when your body temperature drops. The only exercise just before bedtime that can help induce sleep is gentle stretching for a few minutes. Strenuous exercise in the late afternoon promotes the most restful sleep. Exercise is particularly important the day after a bad night's sleep. Being less active the next day only magnifies your sleep problems.

14. Take A Warm Bath

Enjoying a hot bath before bedtime will help you relax both mentally and physically. As your body cools after the bath, you are more likely to fall asleep.

15. Watch What You Eat

Eating too much before bedtime can disrupt your sleep because your body is actively involved in the process of digestion. However, going to bed hungry may also disrupt your sleep, so try a light snack (i.e., warm milk which contains the sleep inducer tryptophan, bread, cheese, crackers, cookies, cereal, or other snacks high in carbohydrates). To maximize your chances of sleeping, eat a light breakfast and lunch but a big meal in the evening at least 4 hours before bedtime.

There are a number of tyrosine rich foods that can disrupt sleep including fermented cheese, ripe avocados, fermented meats (i.e., salami, pepperoni, bologna), and some imported beers. Foods high in protein may also induce wakefulness.

16. Avoid Watching Your Clock

Attending to your clock during the night will often increase your sense of worry and ultimately disrupt your sleep. Turn your clock around or cover it up if you cannot train yourself to avoid looking at it during the night.

17. Restrict Your Liquid Intake Before Bed

If you drink too much before bed, you may very well disrupt your sleep because you need to go to the washroom. Trips to the washroom will likely disrupt the quality of sleep since we do not get the deep restorative phases of sleep if it is interrupted rather than continuous. Diuretics (i.e., water pills) should be taken in the morning rather than at night for the same reasons.

18. Assess the Effect Of Your Prescription Medications

Some medications such as birth control pills, blood pressure medications, diet pills, and anti-depressants can affect the sleep cycle. If they do, it may be necessary to switch to other medications that have the same beneficial effects but do not influence your sleep.

19. Address Any Underlying Medical Issues

There are several medical problems that could interfere with your sleep that are worth checking out. These include heartburn, asthma, arthritis, angina, chronic pain, and breathlessness.

20. Use Sleeping Pills Very Cautiously

The occasional use of sleeping pills may help, but using them more than a couple of nights at a time will likely throw off your normal sleep cycle and cause problems in the long run. Sleeping pills lose their effectiveness with extended use, can be addictive, may cause "rebound insomnia" when you stop using them, and may interfere with the most restorative stages of sleep.

21. Do Not Panic

If you cannot sleep, do not panic. The more you panic the less chance you will sleep. Sleep is a natural process you do not want to force. Just let it happen. Remember, we can still function without much sleep even though it does not feel very good. Perhaps you do not need as much sleep as you think, or look at it as more time to live.

PROCRASTINATION

Identification:

At its simplest level procrastination means putting off until tomorrow that which could be done today. It is estimated that 90% of university students procrastinate and 25% of those students are chronic procrastinators. Procrastination is considered almost universal, but university students are particularly susceptible because of the large amount of work expected of them, the amount of unstructured time available to them, and the high number of more desirable distractions open to them. In fact, procrastination is a very complex psychological behaviour that can have numerous causes and is not just a simple problem of poor time management. Procrastination inevitably leads to feelings of guilt, inadequacy, self-doubt, frustration, and depression.

Despite its complex nature, procrastination can be beat. Here are some of the most common strategies to get a handle on it.

Coping Strategies:

1. **Understand Why You Procrastinate**

There are many potential reasons students procrastinate and understanding these can help you overcome your procrastination. Many students assume that they are just lazy or have no self-discipline, but it is rarely this simple. Think about what you might have to gain by procrastinating. It would likely help to explore these reasons with a counsellor where you can develop a plan to deal with them. Some of the common causes of procrastination include:

(a) Perfectionism

Perfectionism refers to having unrealistically high standards or expectations for yourself. Fears of doing less than a perfect job can stop you from even beginning the task or cause you to agonize over every aspect of it.

Strategy: Realize that perfection is unobtainable and that you will feel worse if you do not complete the task at all. Praise yourself for what you have done and reassure yourself that perfection is not necessary to be successful in university.

(b) Feeling Inadequate

If you believe that your skills are inadequate, it can sometimes feel easier to not even put yourself to the test rather than try and fail. In this way you can blame your poor performance on lack of effort rather than your "innate skills."

Strategy: Realize that much of a student's success in university is about a consistent work ethic rather than their innate abilities. By putting in the effort, your marks will improve and your sense of inadequacy will ultimately fade.

(c) Undeveloped Study Skills

Students who have not developed effective study skills can be very frustrated with the process of studying because it is not paying off and leaves them feeling bored rather than stimulated. As a result, it becomes easier to procrastinate than face your study materials.

Strategy: Developing some effective study skills can leave you feeling more satisfied with yourself and will ultimately pay off in your marks. The Academic Support Centre (on the U of A Campus) is available to assist you in your study skill development through both workshops and individual assistance.

(d) Aversion To Discomfort

Due to the sheer volume of information you need to assimilate as a student and the complexity of the material, it requires one to face a lot of discomfort. Some students have never been trained or have never trained themselves to face and work through this discomfort.

Strategy: Practice pushing yourself on uncomfortable tasks so that you can experience the sense of gratification that this brings. You will never learn to enjoy the feelings of discomfort, but a more positive habit will be reinforced by the longer term gratification of better marks and improved self-esteem.

(e) Resentment

Resentment in university can be generated from a number of sources including: being pushed to go to university/college by your teachers or parents, being disillusioned with the academic environment and high expectations, not feeling like your instructors care about you personally, or not getting into the program you wanted. One possible way of expressing your resentment is to passively resist doing the required work since no one can make you do it.

Strategy: Dealing directly with the source of your resentment would be most appropriate. This may require you to talk directly with your parents, instructors, the university administration, or a counsellor.

(f) Being Overextended

If you are overloaded with demands, you will likely feel overwhelmed which can paralyze any productive actions.

Strategy: Begin by evaluating your obligations and demands and prioritize these. Then determine what you can delay, delegate, or possibly even omit from your list. Finally, put all of your energy into your high priority tasks.

(g) Lifestyle Issues

If you are in the habit of sleeping in everyday, have become addicted to the Internet, or party too often and too hard, then these lifestyle issues may tie back into your procrastination.

Strategy: First you need to identify which lifestyle issues are affecting your academic performance and then focus your energy directly on these issues. Specific strategies to deal with them will depend on the issue.

(h) Fear Of Success

Some students are afraid of being too successful due to a variety of concerns including: not feeling it is "cool", not wanting to have to maintain these same high standards of success, fears that they will be rejected by their peers, or concerns others will be jealous of them.

Strategy: Understand that your success in university transcends your immediate connection with peers or the opinions of others around you. Being successful in university/college is a gift you give yourself and it impacts your long-term happiness and well-being.

(i) Overwhelming Negative Emotional States

High levels of anxiety, depression, or other negative emotions makes focusing on your academic work difficult and procrastinating easy. Worrying can become your dominant coping strategy rather than taking actions to get your work completed.

Strategy: If you have not been able to manage your emotions on your own or with the help of family or friends, perhaps it is time to investigate the option of counselling. Student Counselling Services (or the counselling service on your campus) can help you identify the sources of your negative emotions and develop strategies to better manage them.

2. Visualize Your Life Without Procrastination

Imagine yourself without all the stress that procrastination brings, having marks you are proud of, having free time without guilt, not having to put in "all nighters" before an exam, and having your work done before the deadlines. This could be you! Visualize how you would act, think, and feel and then make it your life. Begin by acting like a non-procrastinator for an hour, a day, or a week to see what it feels like.

3. Accept That There Is No Magical Cure

Overcoming procrastination will take energy like all good things in life. But realize that it may be more about working smarter than about working harder. Procrastination can actually sap our energy, whereas accomplishing goals can give one back enthusiasm for college/university. Learning may actually become fun again!

4. Set Realistic Goals

Procrastinators tend not to set goals or if they do, they are unrealistic and therefore unattainable. Set goals that are specific, measurable, realistic, and time limited. Be sure to write out your goals so you can refer back to them when you need to.

5. Prioritize Your Goals

Since as a student your time is both limited and often unstructured, you need to decide what is most important and work on these goals first. Then work your way down to the lower priority items.

6. Develop A Plan Or Schedule

Once you have established your goals and prioritized them, you need to develop a specific plan as to how you will achieve them. This would likely take the form of a daily or weekly schedule or to-do list. A good plan can be the most effective way to overcome procrastination. Do not beat yourself up if you do not stick to the schedule rigidly. All plans require flexibility. Do not forget to schedule in time for exercise, sleep, meals, relaxation, and socializing. Fine-tune your schedule after a week or two to make sure it works for you.

7. Just Get Started

Do not wait until inspiration hits to begin a task. Just begin now and your chances of completing the task will go up enormously. Start with whatever task is easiest to do first so you experience some immediate success. Reading over lecture notes or reviewing a chapter you have already read may be an easier start than completing a difficult assignment. Commit yourself to the task for at least 5 or 10 minutes.

8. Break Down Large Projects

Since large projects can be particularly overwhelming, break them down into small manageable pieces. We can do even the most undesirable tasks for short periods of time. Start early on big tasks and work on them on a daily basis even for a few minutes. Do not think that the only way to work is in big blocks of time.

9. Reward Goal Attainment

The best way to develop a positive work habit is to reward yourself when you have

achieved even the smallest of tasks since we are more likely to repeat those behaviours that are rewarded. Rewards can include almost anything you enjoy such as TV watching, time with friends, hobbies, talking on the phone, your favorite foods, or a weekend away. Keeping a journal of what you have accomplished can be rewarding in itself.

10. Develop More Rational Self-Talk

Keep a record of all of the excuses you use to avoid doing your work, and write them out on one side of a paper. Then begin to challenge the faulty reasoning behind them and write more realistic thoughts on the opposite side of the page. For example:

| <i>Excuses</i> | <i>Rational Self-Talk</i> |
|--|---|
| "I'm not in the mood." | "I'm never in the mood. Mood doesn't get my work done." |
| "I'll do it tomorrow." | "If I get it done now, I can enjoy my free time rather than feel guilty." |
| "I'm too lazy." | "Labelling only makes me feel bad; the work still needs to be done." |
| "I work better under pressure." | "I'm tired of all the stress that leaving it to the end brings." |
| "There's lots of time to get it finished." | "The sooner I get it finished the sooner I can play." |

Each time you catch yourself using an excuse to avoid your work, engage in this same process so that over time you will train yourself to recognize your excuses and think in more realistic terms.

11. Focus On What Has Been Accomplished

Once you begin your plan, focus on what you have done rather than what is left to do. Remember that success breeds success so focusing on your accomplishments is much more motivating. Dwell on success rather than on failure.

12. Choose Your Work Environment Carefully

Working at home can be more convenient, but it may also be full of distractions (i.e., TV, food, telephone, family, friends, internet, etc.). Working in the library or an empty

classroom may be a better choice. Make sure you go there with everything you need to study. If you choose to work at home, make sure the environment is most conducive. Study at a desk or table, ensure that it is quiet and has enough light, and be sure the desk is neat and organized.

13. Choose Your Classes Carefully

If you really dislike your classes, motivating yourself to study or complete assignments will be only that much more difficult. Choose classes based on your passion and procrastination will be much less of a threat to your success.

14. Do Not Stop Trying Even If It Is Difficult

If you get stuck temporarily, shift to an easier task and come back to the obstacle later. If this does not work, talk to a classmate, friend, or instructor about the assignment or material. This input may be enough to push you through the road block. Or start on a different part of the assignment or study material. You do not have to work methodically from the beginning to the end.

15. Set Aside A Time For Your Worries

If during your study time you tend to focus on or worry about other issues in your life, set aside a specific time during the day to worry. If you begin to worry, remind yourself that you can hold off thinking about the issue until your "worry time." Use your worry time to decide which of your worries are about issues you can control and which are outside your control. Then accept the issues you cannot control and develop a plan to overcome the issues you can control.

16. Develop A Study Buddy

If you have a friend or classmate who has not fallen prey to procrastination, see if they are willing to become your "study buddy." This will help reduce feelings of loneliness or the sense of deprivation one often feels by studying for longer periods of time alone. You would, however, likely need to establish rules around interruptions and breaks so that you do not sabotage each other's work.

17. Use Prompts

To remind yourself of your goals, write or design reminders that you can post in various places (i.e., car steering wheel, TV, mirror, refrigerator, on front door). The more we remind ourselves of our goals, the more likely we will follow our plans.

18. Determine When You Work Best

People tend to have certain times of the day when they are most productive. Some people are most productive in the morning, others at night. When you have determined your most productive time, reserve it for your most important or difficult tasks.

19. Let Go Of Perfectionism

Trying to write the perfect essay or do the best ever assignment may seem overwhelming. Instead, expect that with most written work you will need to do one or two drafts and realize that editing is just part of the process. Write the first draft without censoring yourself.

20. Write A Contract

Make a contract with yourself to complete your goal, or better yet make it with someone else you feel cares about your success. Put the contract in writing and sign it to give it more weight.

TEST ANXIETY

Identification:

Some anxiety before or during tests is to be expected and can, in fact, enhance our motivation to study and our test taking ability. However, when anxiety reaches levels that are actually detrimental to our performance -- in terms of either our ability to study for a test or our ability to take it -- then it is often labeled as test anxiety.

One should also distinguish between anxiety that occurs because of inadequate preparation for a test and anxiety that occurs despite adequate preparation. We would expect high levels of anxiety if we were unprepared to write an exam. However, if you are well prepared and still experience a sense of panic, then you are likely experiencing test anxiety.

Some of the symptoms that are commonly associated with test anxiety include:

| <i>Emotional</i> | <i>Cognitive</i> | <i>Physical</i> |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Panic• Fear• Anger• Wanting to cry• Inappropriate laughter• Feeling helpless• Worry about failing the exam | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Going blank on questions• Difficulty reading and understanding exam questions, or needing to reread them• Difficulty organizing your thoughts in written responses• Doing poorly on the exam even though you know the material• Being easily distracted during the exam• Remembering the right answer after the exam | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Upset stomach• Sweating and trembling hands• Muscle tension in the shoulder and back of the neck• Dry mouth• Pounding heart• Headache |

Coping Strategies:

1. Thorough preparation is absolutely key to reducing your level of anxiety and could include any of the following strategies:
 - Review all available information including your textbook, lecture notes, and previous assignments and labs.
 - Discuss anything confusing in the above materials with other students, teaching assistants, or instructors.
 - Review information over the course of days and weeks if possible, rather than cramming.
 - Develop a specific study schedule and stick to it closely.

- Generate some questions based on your textbook and lecture notes and try to answer them.
 - If you do not have time to study all of the course information, ask your instructor what would be more important to focus on and study it well.
 - Take a practice exam under conditions similar to the real exam.
2. Change your overall mindset by focusing on the following ideas:
- A real education is about learning rather than marks.
 - One test will rarely change your life -- there will be more.
 - Grades do not have to reflect your self-worth.
 - Success should be evaluated on whether you followed your study plan rather than your grades. They will improve over time.
 - Grades do not necessarily predict your future success.
3. Identify, challenge, and ultimately change any negative self-talk. Examples of typical negative self-statements include:
- "I'm going to fail this exam."
 - "Everyone else knows this material better than I do."
 - "Why even bother to study? It never pays off."
 - "The exam questions never reflect what I know anyway."
 - "I can never do well on this kind of exam (i.e., multiple choice, short answer, essay)."

Once you have identified your typical negative self-talk, look for evidence for it and if there isn't solid evidence, create more accurate and positive self-talk such as:

- "This test will be difficult, but I have time to prepare."
 - "I don't know how prepared other people are. I just need to put in my best effort."
 - "Consistent study will usually pay off."
 - "The more I know, the better I will perform."
 - "I need to learn how to write these kinds of exams."
4. Use thought stopping to get yourself out of any vicious cycles of worry. This can involve attaching an elastic band to your wrist and flicking it lightly on your wrist to change the focus of your attention. Yelling "stop" or another word or phrase may also be helpful, either alone or in conjunction with the above strategy.
5. Learn how to relax your body using some of the following psychologically based relaxation skills:
- Diaphragmatic Breathing -- breathe slowly and deeply to the count of five as you inhale and then again five as you exhale. If you are doing it properly, both your chest and then your stomach will rise as you inhale.

- Autogenic Training -- repeat certain key phrases to yourself as you progressively relax your body. These include:
 - "Breathing smooth and rhythmic."
 - "My heartbeat is calm and regular."
 - "My arms and hands are heavy and warm."
 - "My legs and feet are heavy and warm."
 - "I am calm."
 - Progressive Muscle Relaxation -- tighten then relax different muscle groups in your body. Hold tension in the muscle for approximately 7 seconds and then relax the muscle for 20 to 30 seconds. You can target any muscle group in your body, particularly those that are chronically tense.
 - Passive Muscle Relaxation -- progressively focus on each muscle group in your body, starting from either your head or your feet, and use the power of your mind to relax that part of your body. Imagining a wave of relaxation flowing through your body may help.
 - Imagery -- focus on whatever images you find most relaxing, whether that is a trip to the beach or sitting in front of a fire. Use all of your five senses to heighten your level of relaxation.
6. Self-care: Anxiety is reduced when we are taking care of our basic needs and making self-care a priority. This would include:
- Maintaining a regular exercise routine.
 - Establishing a healthy diet.
 - Developing a regular sleep cycle and getting plenty of sleep the night before the exam. Do not pull an all-nighter.
 - Stay involved in both recreational and social activities to enhance your overall well being.
 - Take frequent breaks while studying.
7. Prepare yourself the day of the exam in the following ways:
- Eat a sensible breakfast. Overindulging the day of the exam may lead to sluggishness and/or an upset stomach.
 - Relaxing (using the previously described techniques) an hour before the exam rather than studying. Cramming at that stage will not pay off.
 - Arrive early (5 - 10 minutes) to the exam location so that you can pick a seat you are most comfortable with (i.e., away from distractions).
 - Bring some distracting materials (i.e., newspaper, magazines) to focus on before the exam or go for a short walk.

- Avoid classmates who may increase your anxiety with questions you cannot answer or whose own anxiety is contagious.
- Avoid caffeine (i.e., in coffee, tea, or soft drinks) before the exam.

8. During the exam use some of the following strategies:

- Quickly review the whole exam before you answer any of the questions.
- Take time to read the instructions carefully, twice if you need to. Remember this is time well spent.
- Begin by answering the easiest questions first to build up your sense of confidence.
- If you blank out on a question or cannot answer it, skip it and go on to another.
- When you are unsure about an answer, mark the question and go back to it if you have time at the end of the exam.
- If you get overwhelmed with anxiety, use some of the relaxation techniques you have learned to relax your mind and your body.
- Keep track of the time so you can pace yourself appropriately. How much time you spend on a question should depend on how much the question is worth.
- If you are unsure about what is being asked in a question, ask the instructor or proctor for clarification.
- Eliminate any negative self-talk and replace it with more helpful statements to yourself.
- Use other distraction skills to reduce your anxiety such as: sharpening your pencil, having a drink, eating a snack, or going to the washroom.
- Avoid focusing on what other students are doing during the exam as this is an unhealthy distraction.
- Do not panic when you are not the first to hand in your exam. You do not get extra marks for finishing early.
- Use any extra time to review your answers, but do not change your answers unless you are sure they are correct.

9. After the exam, try the following:

- Reward yourself whether you think you did well on the exam or not. Reward your effort.
- Focus on what you did right rather than any mistakes you may have made.
- Do not discuss the exam questions with other students. It will likely only increase your anxiety.
- Evaluate your success in reducing your anxiety and develop a new plan to reduce it further on your next exam.
- Do not immediately start studying for another exam. Take some time to relax first.

PANIC/ANXIETY ATTACKS

Identification:

Research has indicated that a surprisingly large number (i.e., 35%) of college and university students have experienced a panic/anxiety attack. People who experience panic attacks often describe them as “the worst feeling they have ever had”. People frequently experience their first panic attack in late adolescence and through their 20s. Panic attacks tend to increase in frequency, severity and duration, without some form of treatment. Approximately 3% of the population go on to develop panic disorder, which includes recurring panic attacks with fears of more attacks.

The most commonly reported symptoms of panic attacks include:

- Shortness of breath
- Intense fear, dread, or terror
- Tightening, discomfort, or pressure in the chest, neck, or back
- Racing or pounding heart
- Sweating
- Lump in the throat or choking sensations
- Dizziness or light-headedness
- Faintness
- Shaking or trembling
- Tingling in the hands or feet
- Dry mouth
- Nausea or butterflies in the stomach
- Hot flashes or chills
- Needing to urinate or defecate
- A strong desire to escape the situation
- De-realization (i.e., feeling unreal or dreamy)
- Depersonalization (i.e., feeling outside of yourself)
- Irrational thinking and irrational fears

Remember, not everyone experiences the same symptoms or all of the symptoms listed. These vary based on your own individual biological makeup. However, since these symptoms can be very intense, they are frequently misinterpreted and people often think they are dying, having a heart attack, going crazy, suffocating, going to faint, losing control over their bodies, or going to embarrass themselves. Due to these fears, people often also come to fear that they will have another panic attack and frequently come to avoid either places or situations they believe may trigger another panic attack. Fortunately, these fears are unfounded and people can learn to both reduce and ultimately eliminate their panic attacks. The following strategies will help you better understand and cope with your panic attacks.

Coping Strategies:

1. Go For A Medical Consultation

Before you do anything else, it is very important that you see a physician to rule out any potential medical reasons for your symptoms. In the vast majority of cases there are no medical concerns and knowing this in itself will produce a significant sense of relief. If there are specific medical issues that can explain your symptoms, address the medical conditions and your symptoms will likely resolve without further treatment.

2. Know That Panic Attacks Are Treatable

Realize that panic attacks are highly treatable if you are willing to educate yourself about the nature of panic attacks and both learn and use the strategies listed in this handout. Statistics indicate that by using these strategies, 80 to 90% of people will experience relief. Some people may need to enhance these techniques with medication if they have not responded to the strategies after a significant trial period.

3. Realize That Panic Attacks Can Do No Harm

Understand that a panic attack cannot and will not cause you any harm or any of the following, even though you may fear it will happen. Panic attacks do not cause:

- Heart attacks
- Mental illness
- Respiratory failure
- Suffocation
- Fainting
- Loss of balance
- Loss of bodily control
- Strokes
- Death

Panic attack symptoms have never harmed anyone. Each of these fears is completely imaginary because you simply have not understood what is happening to your body, the bodily changes feel so intense, and the symptoms have often occurred for no apparent reason. Panic attacks can even wake you up out of your sleep.

Understand that panic attacks are a normal bodily response to perceived danger which occur even though there is no real danger in the situation. This response is commonly referred to as the stress response or the fight and flight response and has great survival value in that it prepares our body to either fight or flee a dangerous situation. In a panic attack, the changes are physiologically indistinguishable from the stress response but serve no useful function since there is no real danger.

Since the symptoms of a panic attack can be intense, they can also be very frightening. Realize that this response poses no danger to your body and could go on for hours or days without any adverse effect. Each physical symptom you experience can be explained completely when you understand the purpose of the fight and flight response (i.e., to get your body ready to deal with a dangerous situation).

4. Do Not Try To Stop All Symptoms

Do not try to stop the panic attack immediately since this will prove unsuccessful and lead to more anxiety, fear, and frustration. Do begin to apply the strategies you are about to learn to calm your body and your mind.

Once adrenalin is released into your body, it will take some time to metabolize so you cannot stop the panic attack that second. Some symptoms will be experienced, but it will be short lived if you do not overreact to the symptoms. The symptoms will peak in 3 to 5 minutes and then quickly subside.

5. Develop An Accepting Attitude Toward Your Symptoms

Try to develop an understanding and accepting attitude toward your symptoms, knowing that there is no real danger. Allow yourself to simply accept what is happening in your body with the knowledge that you know how to manage it. Do not try to fight your symptoms. Just give them time to pass.

6. Use Positive Self-Statements

Write out and, at the initial stages of the panic attack, begin to repeat some positive coping statements in your mind. You can use a single phrase or combination of statements, depending on what is successful for you. Use those statements that are most relevant to you and your symptoms. Some common positive coping statements include:

- "I know what is happening to my body. I just need to begin my breathing."
- "I can accept the changes in my body because they pose no threat to me."
- "The worst that can happen is I'll feel uncomfortable. I can live with that."
- "I know what to do. I've handled this effectively before."
- "This never lasts long if I use my strategies."
- "This is good practice to apply what I've learned."
- "I can't stop the symptoms this second and I don't need to."
- "I can survive this. I've done it before."
- "This is only anxiety. I'm not going crazy."
- "I need to just go with the flow."
- "This isn't a heart attack. I've had it checked out medically."
- "Nothing serious can happen to me. It's just unpleasant."
- "This is just the fight and flight response. There is nothing to fear."

7. Learn And Practice Diaphragmatic Breathing

In conjunction with your positive coping statements, begin to do some diaphragmatic breathing. Since the fight and flight response is what we refer to as an all-or-none response, all you need to do is change one component of it to get control of the other symptoms. Since our breathing is under our conscious control, this is the first and often best place to start to induce the opposite response (i.e., the relaxation response in our body).

Diaphragmatic breathing involves slowly breathing in through your nose to the count of 5 and exhaling through your mouth again to the count of 5. If you are breathing properly, your stomach will rise at the end of each inhale. Put your hand on your stomach to assess whether you are breathing properly. Also remember that learning to do diaphragmatic breathing is a skill and therefore, the more you practice it when you are not having a panic attack, the better you will be able to apply it when you need to. Diaphragmatic breathing will also prevent you from hyperventilating, which would only exacerbate a panic attack.

8. Use Distraction Techniques

Engage in a wide variety of distraction techniques to alter the focus of attention away from the bodily symptoms you are experiencing. The range of potential distractions is truly limitless and can involve anything from simple repetitive activities to those that require very focused attention. Examples of some of these activities include:

- Counting backwards in threes from 100
- Playing with the ring on your finger
- Watching the seconds ticking off on your watch
- Chewing gum
- Working on your computer
- Putting together a puzzle
- Talking to a friend
- Playing a musical instrument
- Focusing on your academic or work tasks

9. Become Physically Active

Once adrenalin is released into your body, you will have a significant surge of energy. Rather than have this energy manifest itself as anxiety or anxiety symptoms, you can dissipate it through physical activity. This physical activity can take almost any form, including:

- Running
- Cycling
- Doing household chores

- Gardening
- Swimming
- Weight training
- Stretching your body
- Yoga
- Any sport

10. Engage In A Pleasurable Activity

Doing anything pleasurable during a panic attack will both distract you from your symptoms and produce positive feelings that are incompatible with anxiety. Again, the list of pleasurable activities is endless and depends on your time and interests but could include:

- Going to a movie
- Eating a snack or meal
- Watching TV
- Playing a board game or cards
- Getting romantic with your partner
- Having a shower or bath
- Playing a video game
- Going to a concert

11. Keep A Log Of Your Panic Attacks

By keeping a log of your panic attacks, you can learn to understand what triggers them and thus learn to better control them. Focus your record on what conditions were present prior to the panic attack. Possible triggers include: stress (acute or chronic), negative thinking, fatigue, hyperventilation, temperature changes, strenuous exercise, stimulants (i.e, coffee, nicotine), sugar, changes in your environment, particular people, mood changes, significant losses, or subtle internal changes (i.e., in heart rate or muscle tension). Research indicates that people who are prone to panic attacks are overly focused on subtle changes inside their body and perceive these changes as indicative of something catastrophic happening in their body. For example, they feel a slight constriction in their chest and believe that it means they are going to suffocate.

12. Identify Your Early Symptoms Of Panic

Panic attacks typically involve an escalation of symptoms, starting with those that are very subtle to those that feel overwhelming. If you can develop an awareness of these more subtle early symptoms and apply coping strategies at this stage, it is much more likely that you will be able to prevent a full-blown panic attack. Some of the early symptoms might include sweaty hands, an increase in your heart rate, tightening of muscles in your body, or dizziness. The more skilled you become at identifying these early warning signs, the more control you can gain over your panic attacks.

13. Learn To Rate Your Anxiety Level

Since your level of anxiety and the intensity of your symptoms change over the course of the panic attack, it can be very helpful to rate your level of anxiety. A rating scale from 0 to 10 is adequate, where 0 is no anxiety and no other symptoms, and 10 is extreme anxiety with fears that you are going to die or go crazy and multiple symptoms.

Once you have learned to rate your anxiety, you can either simply observe the rise and fall of the rating or learn to apply different coping strategies depending on the ratings.

14. Reduce Your Overall Stress Level

A few simple changes to your daily routine can reduce your overall stress level and thus make you less susceptible to panic attacks. These could include:

- Daily exercise
- Eliminating stimulants (i.e., caffeine, nicotine) and sugar from your diet
- Maintaining a healthy diet
- Slowing down your life
- Building up your support system
- Doing some form of daily relaxation
- Finding solitude

15. Tell Others About Your Difficulties With Panic Attacks

By telling other people about your panic attacks, you will often experience a significant reduction in anxiety because you will no longer fear being discovered in the midst of your panic attack. As well, if other people know, they can be both understanding and supportive. Remember, everyone in the world experiences periods of significant anxiety and has to learn to manage it. Statistics indicate that up to 30% of the general population have experienced a panic attack at some point in their lifetime.

16. Do Progressive Muscle Relaxation Exercises

Progressive muscle relaxation is a very concrete way to induce a state of relaxation in your body. It simply involves progressively tightening and relaxing various muscle groups in your body. Tighten the muscle group for about 7 seconds and then focus on relaxing it for 25 to 30 seconds. Repeat this throughout every muscle group in your body or focus only on the muscles that usually tighten up during a panic attack.

17. Use Thought Stopping Techniques

Thought stopping is a commonly used strategy to interrupt a negative thought pattern that is unhelpful. Since panic attacks often involve a lot of catastrophic thinking, it is very helpful to interrupt this kind of thinking. To use thought stopping, you would

simply yell stop or something similar, either out loud or in your head. In addition, snap a rubber band against your wrist to help physically alter the focus of your attention. Finally, replace the unhelpful thoughts with some of the positive coping statements previously discussed.

18. Express Your Feelings

Pent up feelings that have not been expressed can elevate your overall stress level and make you more prone to panic attacks. Openly expressing your feelings to other people in ways that respect their feelings can reduce a lot of stress and make you more immune to panic attacks. Writing out your feelings can also be another healthy way to express them, in either a journal, log, or letter.

19. Leave The Anxiety-Provoking Situation Temporarily

If your panic attack is becoming overwhelming, you have the option of temporarily leaving the situation that is inducing the anxiety to reduce your symptoms. However, because you do not want to reinforce this avoidance behavior in the long term, you do need to go back into the anxiety-provoking situations as soon as your symptoms feel in control.

If you are able to manage the panic attack without needing to leave the situation, this is the preferred strategy to ultimately achieve true control.

20. Use Symptom Induction Techniques

Symptom induction means purposefully arousing some of the symptoms of a panic attack with the ultimate goal of perceiving them as harmless on an experiential level. Often, symptom induction techniques are done with the assistance of a psychologist but can be used on your own, given some guidelines.

Before you apply any of the strategies, please ensure there are no medical contraindications (i.e., heart problems, asthma, etc.) in using them. Use the induction techniques for approximately 30 seconds after you notice anxiety or any unpleasant symptoms. Then repeat the technique once per day until it no longer makes you anxious. As outlined by Bourne (2000) in *The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook*, these induction techniques include:

- Hyperventilating for two minutes
- Holding your nose while breathing through a straw for one minute
- Stair climbing for 90 seconds
- Spinning around in a desk chair for one minute
- Tensing up one of the muscle groups in your body for one minute

After completing any of these symptom induction techniques, practice some of your previous coping strategies to reduce your anxiety. This whole process will help you see

symptoms like rapid heart beat, sweating, dizziness, or tension in your body as innocuous rather than a sign of impending doom (i.e., you are having a heart attack or going to suffocate).

21. Make An Appointment With A Psychologist

Although you can develop many of the self-help strategies in this handout on your own, you may benefit from the additional support and expertise of a psychologist at Student Counselling Services (or the counselling service on your campus). We can help you both learn the skills outlined here and use some additional techniques to help you develop mastery over your panic attacks. Symptom induction techniques can be particularly helpful if done with a psychologist to challenge any irrational thinking.

22. Try Medication If All Else Fails

Medication may be helpful to relieve your symptoms, but it is considered a last resort because the other strategies discussed are so potentially effective and medication has several drawbacks. Some of the medications used include anti-anxiety, anti-depressant, and beta-blocker drugs. Each of these classes of medications, however, has many potential side effects. As well, by relying on medications you may not develop the feeling that you have learned to control the panic attacks through your own actions. Some research has indicated that once medications are stopped, panic attacks return (i.e., up to 80% of the time).

ANGER

Identification:

Learning anger management strategies is important for people generally and certainly for students who may meet a wide variety of unique frustrations and challenges as part of their experience on a college or university campus. Some of these potential frustrations include: the initial registration process; instructors who may be better researchers than teachers; receiving poor grades or grades that are seen as unjustified; being placed on academic probation or asked to withdraw from university; being overtaxed with both academic pressures and severe financial worries; conflict with friends, roommates or classmates, and/or having academic supervisors who are uncaring or unduly authoritarian. Of course, this list is only the most obvious potential triggers for anger and many other day-to-day situations that can generate anger exist.

People are generally not taught how to deal with their anger other than through modeling and, unfortunately, there are not a lot of good models out there. Anger, of course, has a biological basis and serves us well to deal with certain threats to our well being. However, in many situations, anger is not justified or it is expressed in a way that is inappropriate and negatively impacts our relationships. As well, anger can significantly affect our health, particularly if it is chronic. Chronic anger contributes to a variety of illnesses such as heart disease, hypertension, headaches, digestive problems, susceptibility to infections, cancer, and skin disorders to mention a few. Anger is probably the least understood and poorly handled emotion. It is the root of some of our most serious social problems including domestic violence, prejudice, assaults, murders, wars, and terrorism. Anger can have enormous costs to you personally and to society in general if not managed appropriately.

Here are some useful strategies to cope better with your anger:

Coping Strategies:

1. Avoid Anger-Provoking Situations

One of the most basic skills in managing anger is to avoid situations, conversations, and/or people that typically make you angry. Of course, this is not always possible but can be highly effective when used consciously. What are your triggers and can you avoid them?

2. Identify Early Warning Signs

Become aware of the early warning signs that you are becoming angry so that you can use strategies early and prevent anger from getting out of control. Common warning signs include a raised voice, heart pounding, faster breathing, dry mouth, flushed face or clenched fists.

3. Keep An Anger Log

Keep a record of various aspects of your anger. These could include:

- The situation that triggered your anger
- The thoughts which generated your anger
- The intensity of your anger
- The techniques you used to control your anger
- How well the techniques worked
- The consequences of your anger on either yourself or those people around you

By keeping a record like this for a couple of weeks, you will have much more information about your anger so that you can apply the most appropriate strategies to manage it.

4. Determine Whether Your Anger Is Justified

Distinguish between anger that is justified and anger that is generated over minor irritations. Examples of situations where anger is justified and therefore helpful include when you are physically threatened or attacked, when you are dealing with a social injustice, or when your boundaries are violated. Anger in these cases can energize you to take meaningful action to resolve the situation.

5. Delay Responding To Your Anger

Delay responding immediately when you begin to feel your anger building. The longer you are able to delay your response, the more likely you will be able to respond rationally rather than explosively. This could involve counting to 10, singing a song in your head, doing something physical, or focusing on something humorous. Anything that serves as a distraction to your angry thoughts would potentially work.

6. Assertiveness

Learn the skill of communicating assertively rather than passively or aggressively. Assertiveness means openly communicating your thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and values in a way that respects the rights of the other person. When you are passive, you fail to communicate your thoughts and feelings and thus disrespect yourself. When you communicate aggressively, you express your thoughts and feelings but in a way that is not respectful of the rights of the other person.

7. Time-Out

Use time-out as a chance to give yourself time to cool down when an argument begins to escalate. Time-outs are typically used when there is conflict between two people and, in this case, you need to first agree on the value of time-out. Once this is established, decide on a time-out signal which can either be verbal (i.e., I need to take a

time out) or visual (i.e., a letter T formed by your two hands). Next, the person taking the time-out needs to tell the other person how long the time-out is for and that they plan on returning to the topic at issue after the time-out. During the time-out, leave the room or building and distract yourself with other preferably relaxing activities. Do not keep re-running the initial conflict in your head.

8. Use Healthy Self-Talk

It is not a situation in-and-of itself that makes us angry but what we say to ourselves about the situation. Anger-triggering thoughts typically either blame others for our pain or involve unrealistic expectations for other people's behavior. Both types of thoughts involve the belief that the other person is wrong, bad, or deserves to be punished.

Replace your anger-triggering thoughts with more healthy self-talk. These of course should be specific to a given situation as much as possible. Some examples of healthy self-talk include:

- "He is only trying to meet his needs, as am I."
- "My anger won't get me what I want. It will only create more conflict."
- "She has the right to say no to my requests."
- "I don't need to get upset. I know how to manage my anger."
- "People will change only when they want to. I can't make them."
- "Don't assume anything. I need to check out my assumptions."

9. Put Yourself In The Other Person's Shoes

Make every effort to see the situation you are angry about from the other person's perspective. Realize that we are all primarily motivated by our own needs and most people do not try to make us angry. People are human and will make mistakes that will unintentionally impact us.

10. Reduce Stress

Stress is considered one of the essential ingredients that fuels our anger. Therefore any strategy that reduces our level of stress is also considered an anger management technique.

11. Relaxation Skills

Just as relaxation skills can be used successfully to manage anxiety and irrational fears, they can also be used to manage anger. Relaxation exercises on a physiological level create a state that is incompatible with anger. Simple relaxation skills to counteract anger include:

- Deep breathing from your diaphragm rather than your chest

- Autogenic words or phrases repeated to yourself such as “calm” or “relax”
- Imagery of a relaxing place or a relaxing time in your life
- Progressively tightening and relaxing various muscle groups in your body
- Focusing on each muscle group in your body and using the power of your mind to relax it

12. Problem Solving Skills

Develop some effective problem solving skills since a lot of anger can be generated when we are frustrated and blocked in developing an effective solution to a problem or issue.

13. Use Rewards And Punishments

Reward yourself for positive efforts to control your anger. This reward can involve anything that you enjoy. At the same time, punish yourself for any aggressive outbursts so it no longer proves profitable to express your anger inappropriately. Anger and aggression can sometimes get us what we want so we also need to devise ways to eliminate these rewards. For example, talk to loved ones who usually give in to you when you are angry and advise them to no longer let your anger be rewarded. Ask them to reward your pleasant interactions instead.

14. Humor

Use humor to de-escalate anger and develop a much more balanced perspective. When we are angry, we tend to develop a very narrow focus where we feel that things need to go our way. Humor can allow you to change your focus and take the situation you are angry about less seriously.

15. Develop A Feeling Vocabulary

Expand your feeling vocabulary since many feelings end up being expressed as anger when people do not have more accurate words to describe their present emotions.

16. Avoid Angry Subcultures

Avoid people, subcultures, or environments that condone violence or angry outbursts. Research indicates that when we are around people who express anger in ways that are unhealthy or inappropriate, we are more likely to model this same behavior.

17. Forgiveness

Practice forgiveness of people by whom you have felt angered. Holding on to your anger has much more detrimental effects on your own health than the person you are angry with. Anger expressed inappropriately also ultimately wrecks relationships and alienates you from people generally.

18. Anger Transformation

Instead of trying to control your anger, you can take the energy that anger generates and put it into more positive directions. This could include four types of transformation:

- Creative (i.e., artistic expressions, scientific inventions, musical representations)
- Social (i.e., social and political activism)
- Existential (i.e., wisdom, serenity)
- Spiritual (i.e., prayer, meditation, forgiveness, reconciliation)

LACK OF ASSERTIVENESS

Identification:

Learning to communicate assertively is an essential skill to both get our needs met and foster healthy relationships. Some of the more common situations where lack of assertiveness is a problem include:

- Saying “no” to others
- Expressing negative feelings
- Stating opinions
- Responding to criticism
- Asking for favors
- Returning defective items to a store
- Asking someone for a date
- Applying for a job or raise
- Giving compliments
- Resisting pressure of a salesperson
- Turning down a request to borrow money
- Talking to or disagreeing with your instructor

Of course, many other situations in everyday life can arise which require assertive skills. Practice the following strategies to improve your assertiveness.

Coping Strategies:

1. Understand the differences between assertive, passive and aggressive communication. The following descriptions should help.

Assertive – Communicating one’s thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in a way that is open, honest, and direct, while respecting the rights and needs of the other person. Assertiveness maximizes the likelihood we will experience a win-win situation. We feel confident and in control, the other person feels respected and thus, ultimately feels respect for us.

Passive – Failing to communicate or communicating in a way that disregards your own rights and needs, or allows others to infringe on your rights. The main purpose of passive behavior is to avoid conflict at all cost. Although conflict may be avoided, the passive person often feels humiliated, taken advantage of, angry toward others, and disgusted at themselves. The other person often feels irritated or disgusted with the passive communicator. This interaction ultimately becomes a lose-win situation, and the passive individual feels like a victim.

Aggressive – Expressing one’s thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in a way that violates the rights and needs of others. The goal of aggressive behavior is to dominate, put down,

or humiliate the other person. We ultimately disrespect the other person because our needs and wishes become more important than theirs. This results in a win-lose, rather than win-win situation. At the time, we may feel superior and self-righteous, but afterwards we often feel guilty and/or fearful of revenge. The other person will feel humiliated, hurt, put down, and angry toward you.

2. Realize that assertiveness involves far more than what we communicate verbally to the other person. Common non-verbal components of assertion include:
 - Direct, but not continuous eye contact
 - Voice tone and volume that is well modulated (i.e., is convincing but not intimidating)
 - Facial expressions that are consistent with the messages being expressed
 - Hand and body gestures which accentuate the message without being a distraction
 - Body posture which involves facing the other person and could include leaning in slightly
 - Overall respect for the personal space of the other person
3. Avoid passive non-verbal behaviors such as:
 - Evasive or limited eye contact
 - Hand wringing
 - Lowered head
 - Hiding behind your hair
 - Hands over face or eyes
 - Turning away from the other person
 - Hunching the shoulders
 - Wooden body posture
 - Soft voice
 - Hesitant speech
 - Smiling or laughing when communicating anger
 - Frequent throat clearing
4. Avoid aggressive non-verbal behaviors such as:
 - Eye contact that tries to stare down the other person
 - Excessively loud voice
 - Not respecting a person's personal space
 - A sarcastic or condescending tone of voice
 - Hand or body gestures that are threatening, such as finger pointing or making a fist
 - Angry facial gestures
 - Forcefully touching or pushing the other person
5. Incorporate the following assertive rights into your belief system. You have the right to:

- Be treated respectfully and with dignity
 - Make mistakes
 - Say no without feeling guilty
 - Change your mind
 - Ask for what you want or need
 - Decide what is best for you
 - Ask questions
 - Express your feelings and opinions
 - Protect yourself from either physical or psychological harm
 - Show your weaknesses without feeling guilt or shame about them
 - Be listened to by others
6. Identify and challenge any irrational beliefs you hold, which may lead to passivity. Some common irrational beliefs which lead to passivity include:
- “I need to be liked and approved of by everyone.”
 - “It isn’t all right to express negative thoughts or feelings.”
 - “My needs should never come first; this would be selfish.”
 - “People will not like me, or worse will reject me, if I assert myself.”
 - “If I hurt others by expressing my feelings, I am responsible for their feelings.”
 - “I can’t say no to other people’s requests; they will be angry with me.”
 - “One needs to avoid conflict at all cost.”
 - “Why bother being assertive since I won’t always get what I want anyway.”
 - “If people are angry with me for being assertive, I would be devastated.”
7. Identify and challenge irrational beliefs that may lead to aggressive communication. Some common irrational beliefs which promote aggressive communication include:
- “To get what you want, you need to demand it.”
 - “People will walk all over you if you aren’t strong and aggressive.”
 - “You need to be aggressive to survive in this world.”
 - “Other people deserve your aggression if they have in some way wronged you.”
 - “People will see you as powerful if you aggressively express yourself.”
8. Use “I” statements to express yourself, particularly when expressing difficult negative emotions. These statements typically involve four parts.

| | |
|------------|--|
| Feeling | I feel ... (describe the feeling) |
| Behavior | when ... (describe the behavior) |
| Effect | because ... (describe the specific effect of the behavior) |
| Preference | I’d prefer ... (describe what you would prefer) |

Here is an example of what might be said if a friend frequently shows up late for lunch dates and you want to respond assertively to the issue:

E.g., *I feel frustrated and angry*
when you show up late for lunch
because it doesn't leave us enough time to enjoy our lunch together.
I'd prefer you only set up a lunch date if you are sure you have the time.

9. In communicating assertively, try to avoid the following:
 - Assumptions (without having checked them out)
 - Sarcasm (i.e., "Why did you even bother coming?")
 - Labeling (i.e., "You're an ungrateful pig.")
 - Generalizations (i.e., "You *always* treat me this way.")
 - Exaggerations (i.e., "You *never* treat me well.")
 - Judgments (use factual descriptions instead)
 - Statements beginning with "you" (i.e., "You are always late for lunch"). Use "I" statements instead.
 - Threats (unless they are reasonable and you are willing to carry them out)
 - Vague words or descriptions (be specific)
 - Emotional outbursts (i.e., "You drive me crazy!")

10. Practice your assertive response prior to an encounter by:
 - Writing out what you plan to say
 - Visualizing the entire situation in your head before you encounter it
 - Rehearsing or role-playing the situation with a friend or family member

11. Be prepared to escalate your assertive response if met with resistance. Escalating assertion begins with a minimally assertive statement that enables you to accomplish your goal with the minimum effort necessary. If the other person ignores your initial assertion, you would gradually increase the firmness of your assertion, while still being respectful.

PERFECTIONISM

Identification:

People who are perfectionistic have unrealistically high standards for themselves and/or other people, and therefore, end up feeling like they or other people are never good enough. Since achieving perfection rarely if ever happens, particularly in college or university, perfectionists rarely experience the sense of success and acceptance they are striving for. Instead, they usually end up with a number of negative feelings including anxiety, depression, frustration, anger, and guilt. At more severe levels, perfectionism can create such problems as low self-esteem, writer's block, test anxiety, procrastination, social anxiety, eating disorders, obsessive compulsive disorder, immobilization, and suicidal thoughts or actions.

Bosco (1999) describes perfectionistic people as having the following characteristics:

- Detail oriented
- Focus on rules and structure
- High expectations
- Neat appearance
- Mistakes are avoided
- Confidence is low
- Highly organized
- Significant self-doubt regarding decisions
- Trusting the work of others is difficult

Bosco also describes two types of perfectionists:

| <i>Inwardly-Focused</i> | <i>Outwardly-Focused</i> |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Believe that who they are and what they do is never good enough• May appear successful to other people but inside feel defective• Worry excessively about making mistakes• Hide their inadequacies by working harder than others and worry that their incompetencies will be discovered• Seek treatment because they are anxious, depressed, or have low self-esteem | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are upset by the way others do their work• Believe that others do not care about their work performance• Prefer to do the job themselves rather than worry about the performance of others• Seek help because they do not like the way their lives have gone, do not feel in control of their lives, and are very frustrated with other people in their lives |

Coping Strategies:

1. Realize that perfection is unattainable and that striving for it is self-destructive. Human beings are imperfect creations and will always be.
2. Try to become aware of which factors may have contributed to the development of your perfectionistic attitudes. Some possible factors include:
 - Family history or genetic link
 - Parents who responded to mistakes or performance below their standards, with disapproval and/or withdrawal of affection
 - Societal demands for perfection or being valued in society for only what you achieve
 - Chaotic childhoods within which being perfect gave you a sense of control
 - Significant self-satisfaction when a perfect performance was achieved
3. Distinguish between perfectionism and healthy achievement, and work towards becoming a healthy achiever.

| <i>Perfectionist</i> | <i>Healthy Achiever</i> |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Goals are unattainable• Motivated by failure• Cannot accept own limitations• Perceive mistakes as a personal failure• Are defensive when criticized• Not satisfied with less than perfection | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Goals are high but achievable• Motivated by a desire to succeed• Are aware of and accept their limitations• See mistakes as a way to learn• See criticism as useful information• Enjoy both the process and outcome of a task |

4. Establish much more realistic goals for yourself based on your past performance and the level of effort you want to direct towards a goal. Set goals that are sequential in nature and just beyond what you have achieved before. If you experience anxiety or depression due to a specific challenge, use the symptoms as an opportunity to ask yourself whether you have set up impossible expectations for yourself.
5. Clearly establish your priorities since it is impossible to do all activities perfectly. Put the most energy into your high priority tasks and the least energy into your low priority projects.
6. Try to understand what you fear will happen if your performance is below your unrealistically high standards. Focus on what will likely happen and whether you could indeed handle it. The fears of perfectionists are usually out of proportion to the real consequences of less than perfect performance.

7. Do an experiment with your expectations by aiming for 80% or 70% success rather than your usual pressure on yourself to get 100%. In this way, you will see first hand that the world does not end when your performance is at much more of a realistic level.
8. Change the way you view negative or critical feedback. Many perfectionists see criticism as a personal attack rather than information to simply learn from. Remember that mistakes are a natural part of the learning process and do not need to be avoided at all costs.
9. Be willing to be open with other people about the mistakes you have made so that you can see that you will still be accepted despite them. If you are not, then consider distancing yourself from these people since this is clearly an unhealthy environment. If you have been a perfectionist in the past, many people will see you as both more human and more likeable if you can admit your mistakes.
10. Establish strict time limits for each of your assignments, papers, or projects rather than spend all of your time on one task trying to make it perfect. When the time limit is up, move on to the next task. This technique will reduce your tendency to procrastinate, which is a common aspect of perfectionism.
11. Get a handle on your negative self-talk when you do not achieve a perfect performance. Develop a keen eye for what you did right rather than what you did wrong. Creatively construct a new and healthier script for yourself and practice these much more positive self-statements.
12. Begin to measure your success in a task by how much you enjoyed it rather than your level of achievement. As you find ways to enjoy your work, you will still perform well and be more motivated to perform other tasks.
13. Detach yourself from the outcome of your attempts to be successful by judging yourself based on the effort you put into an activity rather than the results of that effort.
14. Remember the extra effort it takes to achieve perfection is rarely cost effective. You could be much more efficient overall if you diverted this energy into other activities instead.
15. Get support from people who are:
 - Not perfectionists
 - Are forgiving of mistakes and failures
 - Able to give you positive feedback about any positive changes you make
 - Willing to tell you when your expectations are too high

16. List the advantages and disadvantages of your perfectionism.

| <i>Potential Advantages</i> | <i>Potential Disadvantages</i> |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detail oriented • Highly motivated • Self-starter • Independent • Conscientious • Organized • Produce high quality work • Neat and tidy • Reliable • Encourage others to perform at a high standard • Sensitive • Selective in their choice of friends • High personal satisfaction when they perform perfectly • Careful not to make mistakes • Unlikely to act impulsively | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Afraid to take risks • Reluctance to share ideas with others • Fearful of criticism • Work slowly • Underestimate the time it takes to complete a job • Unreasonable expectations • Difficulty delegating their work • Get lost in the details of their work • Fear making a mistake • Stress and anxiety • Tension with other people • Fatigue and exhaustion • Anxiety when things are messy or disorganized • Difficulty finishing projects • End up doing much of the work • Worrying a lot about their children • Distrust other people's abilities • Critical of others • Overly selective in choosing a friend or partner • Unable to tolerate other people's weaknesses • Difficulty making decisions • Self-conscious • Self-doubt • Self-criticism • Depression |

Now, weigh out the advantages and disadvantages of your perfectionism and you may realize that the costs are too great. Instead of giving up all aspects of your perfectionism however, try to hold on to the advantages while letting go of the disadvantages. This would involve setting specific behavioral goals to overcome the disadvantages. For example, if one of the disadvantages of your perfectionism is that you always end up doing all the work on a project, you would establish a goal of delegating a certain percentage of the work to other people.

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