TIPS TO STAY MENTALLY AND EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY WHILE YOU STUDY

The following tips are some ideas that we have found to be important to maintain and improve your mental and emotional health. There are five main areas to look at – Social, Physical, Cognitive, Emotional and Motivation.

Social Strategies
We know that people who are connected to others tend to have better mental health so:

• Stay in touch with friends and family – particularly in those early weeks of coming to university.
• Make contact with other people in your course or who live in your hall. Suggest possible activities such as having a coffee together or going for a walk at lunchtime and allow yourself to accept offers of activities that others suggest.
• Remember to speak to someone from student support services (like the Counselling Centre) for help if you are feeling socially isolated.

Physical Strategies
Caring for your body helps your mind to work better so:

• Get into a good sleep routine
• Make sure you get regular exercise
• Eat a good diet
• Attend to illness as soon as you notice yourself not feeling well
• Avoid activities that you know are problematic or that could become a problem such as gambling, excessive use of alcohol, using drugs and letting the internet or computer games steal time from you.
• If there is a problem speak to someone at the Counselling Centre or your doctor.

Emotional Strategies
Strong emotions will always arise at some times during our lives. Having ways to help manage these so we can think as clearly as possible is a good idea. So:

• Learn breathing exercises, meditation or being in the present (mindfulness). Nearly all our anxiety is about something in the past or future.
• Use distractions such as going for a walk, listening to music or (if you are stuck in a lecture) count the bricks on the wall! Or you may find ‘channelling’ your feelings helpful e.g. if you are angry about something go for a run or sing loudly or try writing your feelings down.
• Notice the good times!
• If you continue to be distressed please come and talk to us at the Counselling Centre.

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Cognitive Strategies

How you think about things is important in maintaining optimum mental and emotional health. Our thoughts and emotions are linked. So:

- Aim to think positively. Remind yourself of your skills and abilities.
- Avoid catastrophic thinking e.g. instead of “it’s a disaster that I got that mark”, think “it is unfortunate that I got that mark, what can I do about it”.
- Avoid absolute thinking e.g. instead of thinking “I always mess things up” think “I didn’t do so well that time, what can I do to improve”.
- Avoid comparing yourself with others. You usually end up feeling bad about yourself.
- If you are having troubles talk to someone at Academic Skills and Learning Centre (ASLC) or the Counselling Centre.

Motivation Strategies

We all lose our motivation for our study from time to time. So:

- Visualize success. Imagine yourself getting your degree, or going out to celebrate – find an image that demonstrates your success and keep that image in your mind’s eye or find an object to represent success.
- Remind yourself of why you are here and what you hoped for when you started your course.
- Set small, specific, realistic goals.
- Keep good work practices – balance work with fun.
- Talk to others about what you are doing.
- Ask for help from your teachers, ASLC or the Counselling Centre if you are struggling.