Managing Anxiety and Stress During COVID-19

Psychology and Counseling Interns
University Health & Counseling Services
Ambrose Health Building Second Floor
Spring 2020 Semester
Academic Success During COVID-19:

It can be challenging to transition to online classes and constantly updating schedules.

Tips for transitioning to online courses:

▲ Find an academic routine and schedule that works for you.
▲ Create a study space in your home
  ● Create a space that is academically focused.
  ● While it’s tempting to do homework and log into classes from your bed wearing sweatpants, moving to a desk and maintaining a morning routine as if you are going out to attend classes can shift your mindset to a studying mindset.
  ● Try to limit distractions. Avoid trying to watch tv or use your phone when you are in your online classes.
▲ Monitor your emails closely to keep up to date with any changes
Academic Success During COVID-19:

▲ Actively participate as you are able in class discussions
▲ Stay connected with professors and others who support you academically
▲ Stay engaged while on Webex or Zoom for class
  ● Avoid having additional tabs open on your computer when virtually attending class
  ● Turn off your cell phone while in class or working on homework
▲ Stay in touch and connected with professors and resources
▲ Be kind and patient with yourself
  ● It’s normal to struggle with focus and feeling productive during this time.
  ● Know that you are not alone, if you need help reach out to peers and professors for added support with courses.
  ● Create time to log on with someone to complete work, or ask someone to help hold you accountable"
Maintaining a Routine:

Routine is defined as actions, in sequence, which is regularly followed.

▲ Routines allow us to develop habits that could be used to reach goals, no matter how large or small.

▲ **How do routines help?**
  - They can reinforce positive habits, while eradicate negative habits. Having a routine can help give us a sense of direction.

▲ **Why are routines important?**
  - Efficiency, reduces need to plan, develops structure, saves time, develops good habits, breaks bad habits, become better at certain tasks if done daily, helps identify important activities that need to be done, develops ability to prioritize, reduces need for determination (if we do something regularly we start to learn the habits as second nature, requiring less effort over time), decreases procrastination, builds momentum to complete other tasks as we complete things, increases self-confidence, reduces stress, increases time for relaxation, frees up time, helps achieve goals, and allows us to track successes.

(Possess Your Success, 2017; Skilled at Life, 2018)
Maintaining a Routine:

▲ **Every Routine Needs:** realistic diligence, time (takes about 21-90 days to develop a new routine), and effort. It may be helpful to write down your routine and review/adjust the routine every 30 days. It is okay to have larger goals, but be sure smaller goals are completed to build into the larger goals.

▲ **How do I start a routine?** Sit down, think about what you want to incorporate into your day, break those ideas into smaller goals, plan your day, set certain times for certain activities, and attempt to stick with your plan. If you still feel overwhelmed, reassess, and break your ideas into even smaller goals. Stay consistent, if you get frustrated, it’s normal, just try again the next day, or move on to next task.

(Possess Your Success, 2017; Skilled at Life, 2018)
Stress and Anxiety:

Stress is your body’s physical, emotional, and behavioral response to any demand or threat. Anxiety is a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease, typically about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome.

▲ Both stress and anxiety are good, in small amounts, but too much of either can be debilitating.
▲ Stress and Anxiety can cause:
  ● An increase in fear and worry
  ● Changes in sleep or eating patterns
  ● Difficulty concentrating
  ● Worsening of chronic health problems
  ● Worsening of mental health symptoms
  ● Headaches or migraines
  ● Abdominal distress
  ● Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs

Know that you are not alone in how you are feeling. Feeling stressed and anxious at a time like this is a normal reaction. What matters most is how you are managing that stress and anxiety.

(Team, T. H. E., 2020)
Coping Skills for Managing Anxiety and Stress:

▲ Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including social media. Hearing the constant updates on COVID-19 can be upsetting.

▲ **Take care of your body.**
  - Try to get at least 30-minutes of exercise or activity a day. (i.e. stretch, do house work, go for a nature walk).
  - Get adequate sleep (typically between 6-8 hours a night).
  - Eat balanced meals (generally each day should include **three meals and three snacks** and has a healthy balance of carbohydrates, fats, and proteins.)

▲ **Take care of your mental health.**
  - Start your day with something you enjoy (i.e a cup of coffee, a song you love, spending time with your pet)
  - Track gratitude and achievements with a journal. Each day write 1-3 things that you are grateful for or that you achieved that day.
  - Practice mindfulness. Mindfulness is the state of being present and engaged in an activity-free from distraction or judgement. It is taking time to notice what sounds you hear, what physical sensations you feel, and what you are thinking about. For examples click [here](#).

▲ **Connect with others.** Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling. If you are feeling significant distress seek help from a profession.

(Mental Health America, 2020)
Sleep Hygiene:

‘Sleep hygiene’ is a term used to describe good, healthy sleep habits. It is a combination of your behaviors and environment surrounding sleep.

▲ Sleep has a major impact on our overall physical and mental health!
▲ **Sleep deprivation can:**
  - Impair memory and judgement
  - Decrease optimism and sociability
  - Impair thinking and concentration
  - Lower the threshold for stress
  - Weaken the immune system
  - Increase changes in mood
  - Lead to weight gain

(National Sleep Foundation, 2020)
Sleep Hygiene:

Tips for a better night sleep:
▲ Get on a regular schedule for both going to bed and waking up
▲ Turn off smartphones, TVs, and computers at least an hour before bed
▲ Avoid alcohol and caffeine 4-6 hours before bed
▲ Exercise and eat a balanced diet
▲ Evaluate your environment- is your room dark enough? Quiet enough?
▲ Keep your eyes off of the clock

For more helpful tips, click here.

(National Sleep Foundation, 2020)
Social Anxiety During Social Distancing:

Social Anxiety is defined as the fear of social situations in which embarrassment may occur or there is a risk of being negatively evaluated by others. Social anxiety involves apprehensiveness about one’s social status, role, and behavior.

▲ Studies have shown that even when healthy, not having social interactions can hurt both your physical and mental wellbeing.

▲ What does this mean during social-distancing?
  ● It means that as we are practicing social-distancing our social anxiety may be lowered.
  ● Why would that be a bad thing?
    ■ As social anxiety lowers, we may notice that our anxiety about other things is increasing.
    ■ This increase in other anxiety can lead to feeling more stressed out, feeling down or depressed, or feeling angry, irritable, and easily frustrated.

(APA, 2020; Dolgin, & Fazel, 2020)
Coping with Social Anxiety During COVID-19:

▲ **When you hear social distancing, think distant socializing!** The goal is not to avoid social interactions, but to still have them in a manner that protects your health. This can include phone calls, text messaging, and even group video chats.

▲ **Be kind to yourself.** Even if social anxiety is low, other types of anxiety may be high due to changes in routines, financial stress, and uncertainty around health and safety. Reorganize your anxiety and focus on what is in your control, instead of what is out of your control. This can be done by simply asking yourself “Can I do anything to change this right now?” if the answer is “no!” it’s out of your control.

▲ **Remember your long-term goals.** It is easy to lose sight of your goals at a time like this but it is important to remember and stay focused on what you are working towards. If your goal is to one day overcome social anxiety, it may help to focus on this by planning small ways on how you can achieve this.

(Ball & Goldberg, 2020)
Coping with Social Anxiety During COVID-19:

▲ Take small steps now. Based on your long-term goal, what small steps could you take right now? For example, if initiating group social interactions is something that worries you, start small by reaching out to one friend or family member by text message, next time initiate a phone call, and ultimately work up to a video chat. After practicing that a few times, move on to initiating a virtual get-together with two or three people. The goal is to create a series of mini-challenges for yourself to do things that you know are safe, that will improve your quality of life, but that you typically feel some anxiety while doing or tend to avoid altogether. Before each mini-challenge, try to figure out what you are most worried will happen, and afterwards, reflect on what actually happened. Was the outcome you feared as likely or as catastrophic as you thought it would be?

▲ Celebrate your achievements. Stepping out of your comfort zone to challenge social anxiety is hard and sometimes scary. You should expect to feel anxious when doing these mini challenges, and that’s okay! Make sure to notice what you learned (e.g., “it’s not as bad as I thought”) and most importantly celebrate your successes.

(Ball & Goldberg, 2020)
Counseling Services:  
UHCS is open from 8 am-4:30 pm, Monday-Friday, on normal business days. With counselors available by phone for telehealth services. At this time UHCS is offering:
- Phone Counseling session
- Video Counseling Sessions

Crisis Services:
- If a student is on campus, and experiencing a crisis they may be seen by a UHCS counselor or
  - Call Campus Police at 262-472-4660 to be connected with support services
  - Go to the nearest emergency room or call 911
- Additional crisis resources:
  - National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 800-273-TALK (8255)
  - National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233
  - Text HOME to 741741
References:


National Sleep Foundation, www.sleepfoundation.org


