



FRESHERS WEEK 2021

TalkCampus Connect

Mental Health Tool Kit

intro



If you're starting University or College in 2021, it probably feels quite bewildering. After a rocky 12 months in and out of restrictions and official guidance for many around returning to campus this September yoyoing about, it can be hard to feel prepared when you have no idea what you should be preparing for. If you're an international student and have to study remotely, the future may look quite different to what you had expected.

This, on top of an already challenging 18 months, may have you feeling a little fatigued. Since early 2020 we've all done our fair share of work to keep our wellbeing in check and spirits high despite long periods of isolation, cancelled plans and being away from loved ones (just to name a few)! Adding in uncertainty about your future and a freshers experience that is not entirely what you had hoped for is bound to cause disappointment and anxiety. While we know how important it is to continue to keep up self-care, you may be finding it tough to stick to an action plan right now.

We've compiled a list of gentle reminders and considerations for creating a digestible and quick action plan if you are struggling to have one right now. Think of it as your mental health tool kit!

A photograph of two young women sitting outdoors on a campus. The woman on the left is wearing a red hoodie and glasses, looking at a laptop. The woman on the right has long dark curly hair, is wearing a white jacket, and is writing in a notebook. A coffee cup is on the table. The background shows a brick building and trees.

one

Find Your Non-Negotiables and Come up With Creative Ways to Stick to Them

Gamify your healthy habits! Make them fun and think of ways to encourage you to keep them up. Things like drinking 8 glasses of water, moving your body, getting enough sleep. How can you get creative about making sure these are daily constants for you? See if you can get a group of friends together and have a step competition over the month to encourage you to get outside and get active.

If you're looking for a new reusable water bottle, we've seen some amazing 2, 3 and even 4 litre ones being sold online with time markings on the side to make sure you are getting your daily intake. If you struggle to stay off social media in the evenings, look into downloading one of the many apps that remind you to switch off and/or can even help block them after a certain time in the evenings.

Think about what is a non-negotiable for you, what makes you feel your best and affects you the most if you go a day without it or with too much of it? Then think how you can creatively make it a priority every day.

two



Take Control Over the Good You Can Contribute to Those Around You

There is a lot that we are unable to control at the moment, so think about those things that are in your control and how you can use them to distribute goodness to the world. Have you ever done a good deed and felt a rush of satisfaction and gratitude after? That is your brain releasing endorphins, your feel-good chemicals, which in turn helps to reduce stress and anxiety, giving your mental health a natural boost.

Check in to see if there are any volunteering projects you can join through your university or college - this is a great way to make new friends too! You could also sign-up for our TalkCampus Buddy program! Where you will learn a range of peer-support skills and have the opportunity to support your fellow students all over the world!



three

Practice Setting Boundaries

There are two types of boundaries that are essential for your mental health as a student, those with yourself and those with others! Learning can feel daunting and overwhelming, and while you want to schedule time to study and learn, scheduling time to wind down, socialise and sleep is just as important for your success. Try and set yourself a structure that allows you to work, play and recharge, enabling you to make the most out of all aspects of university life. This might look like turning your laptop off no later than 7pm each evening.

The same goes for things in your life that may give you a short term happiness boost, only to affect your mood later on, like social media and partying. We aren't saying you need to cut these out - but be mindful of how you are feeling when you engage in these activities and recognise when you may need a break for your mental health.

When it comes to setting boundaries with those around you, it can be really hard to feel comfortable saying 'no'. But with all of the changes that come with being a student, you need to ensure you are always prioritising yourself. Let people know if you don't have the mental capacity to support them with something. If they care about you, they will understand!

A boundary affirmation to remember: Saying no to something gives you the capacity to say yes to something else.

A photograph showing two men in an office setting. On the left, a man with glasses and a white headset is looking towards the right. On the right, a man with a dark complexion is smiling and looking down at a laptop screen. The background is a brick wall.

four

Prepare Some Personal Care Strategies

Think about times in the past where you have felt overwhelmed, anxious or low. What are some of the things that helped you to feel grounded and re centre yourself? It might be a call with a specific person, a mantra, things that can momentarily distract you. Make a list of all of these things and keep this somewhere to help prepare you for any moments in which you may need some personal care.



five

Focus on Yourself, not on the Expectations or Achievements of Others

Committing to a course or degree takes courage and ambition, so you are already a success! It can be so easy to focus on the expectations that family or friends may have of us as well as the achievements of others. You may find yourself getting hyper-focused on everything you feel is going wrong, rather than all the small wins - especially if you are remote learning or you feel like you are struggling to settle.

Remember that no matter how small your wins are, they deserve to be celebrated and getting into the habit of doing this is really good. Even if things sometimes feel really hard, persevering through is an achievement in itself! Finding your strengths and acknowledging your weaknesses come hand-in-hand.

Try to separate any negative feelings you are having from fact. Get a piece of paper and write down all of the small wins, everything you can think of. Then put the piece of paper somewhere you can readily access. Better yet, write it on sticky notes and stick them to your mirror! Use these as evidence and come back to them whenever negativity starts to creep in. Remember that, everyone is completely winging it, all of the time. No-one knows what they are really doing. No one is perfect, and you don't need to be!

Finally, remember that you will have ups and you will have downs and this is a natural part of life, as well as your studies. Be mindful that wherever you are on the roller coaster of life you don't let your self care slip. It's just as important when you're at your peak as when you're feeling at your lowest. Self-care is like a muscle that we need to continually flex to stay strong. The more you can invest in yourself the better you will be able to navigate the challenges that life can throw at you.