

HOW TO COPE WITH THE STRESS OF STUDENT LIFE



Meet people - seek out other newcomers. Loneliness can make the challenges of your new life seem much worse. Yet when you start, everyone is alone. Colleges recognise this and often organise 'getting to know you' social events, 'freshers' fairs' and the like. Take advantage of these and any other social opportunities. The very beginning of your first term, when you first arrive, is a key time for making friends. Use strategies like propping your door open if you are in a hall of residence to encourage people to drop in and get to know you.

If you are shy, you may find it very difficult to join in. But it's important to remember that there will be many students who are feeling nervous and putting a brave face on it. If there is something that especially interests you such as music or a sport, find out if there's a college society that focuses on this. Once you have found some kindred spirits, life becomes more manageable.

New opportunities - There may be sports, social and political activities open to you now, which you've never tried before. This has two aspects: it can be very exciting, but it can also be terrifying. Don't get swept away! It would be unwise to go on your first pot-holing expedition, for example, on the same weekend that you are moving into new lodgings and handing in your first essay! Recognise how much you are dealing with at once, and go at your own pace. Be prepared to feel terrified sometimes.

Get support - Beginning to take responsibility for your own learning needs some support. Staff can act as a support network re tutor or specialist help from the Diversity and Learner Support.

What if work gets too much - If you feel things are getting on top of you, it's important to acknowledge this at an early stage, before you fall too far behind. The first thing to do is to seek objective advice from someone who knows your work and the standards required. Such a person could be your tutor or another lecturer. It may be that your work is fine, but your personal standards are too high - you think your work is not good enough, but others are satisfied with it. On the other hand, it may be that you have not yet learned to organise your work realistically or that you have a problem with deadlines as such.

Your workload may seem overwhelming because you're experiencing emotional problems, which are affecting your ability to concentrate and work effectively. These may be to do with unresolved difficulties from your past or to do with current relationship problems. It's important to seek help and support if you are distressed. You will be able to get access to counselling through college counselling services. If you feel that you are lacking in self-esteem and confidence, it may be worth considering a course of assertiveness training.

How will I cope with the academic work? - Inevitably, you will feel anxious about this to start with. Will I be good enough? Can I keep up? This is a major challenge, and you will be facing it without the close guidance you may have previously enjoyed from a teacher or parent.

Get the right information from the start. How many of the lectures, seminars, laboratory sessions are compulsory? (How much can you get away with not attending?) With assignments, what exactly are you being asked to do? For example, with written work, what is the question? How many words are you expected to write? What is the deadline for handing it in?

Set clear priorities - You need to make hard choices. Sometimes you want to go to that meeting/film/match tonight, but the essay is half finished and has to be handed in tomorrow. You'd like to spend every waking minute with a new partner, but you have an exam next week and you haven't done any revision.

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