



# M-Power

**a resource guide for graduate  
students**

HOW TO MANAGE MENTAL HEALTH SYMPTOMS WITH WORKSHEETS  
AND OTHER RESOURCES

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# Table of contents

Worksheets: Pgs 1-42

1. Be Positive
2. Love Yourself
3. Recenter Yourself
4. Build up your reflection
5. Fly to the moon
6. The Power of "No"
7. Confidently voice your needs
8. Limit social media use
9. Stop Catastrophizing
10. Improve your sleeping habits
11. Take a walk
12. 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding
13. Prioritize yourself
14. Emotional freedom technique (EFT) Tapping
15. Autogenic training
16. Write it down!
17. List your behavioral "ABC's"
18. Practice self-kindness
19. Console with your cohort
20. Develop your wellness wheel
21. Initiate the relaxation response
22. Letting go of worrying

# Table of contents

23. 5-minute deep breathing
24. Let go of anger
25. Revise your goals
26. Challenge negative thoughts
27. Find your flow
28. Create a thought log
29. Box breathing
30. Develop an action list
31. Gratitude journaling
32. Celebrate small victories
33. Let go of guilt
34. Don't should yourself
35. Be conscious of mental health language
36. Challenge mental health narratives
37. Share your struggles
38. Embrace the other facets
39. Decompress with humor
40. Record an anger diary
41. Sphere of control
42. Socratic questioning

# Table of contents

Flyers of further recommendations 43-53

43. Feeling like a fraud?

44. Stress and anxiety

45. Feeling overwhelmed?

46. Having trouble sleeping?

47. Want to fall asleep faster?

48. Why meditate?

49. Stress is inevitable, but burnout is not

50. It's ok to not be ok

51. Stop the stigma

52. You are not alone

53 Need help? We got you



# Be Positive

## Did you know?

Stress is often referred to as the silent killer because it can have many physiological effects such as increased heart rate and blood pressure, breathing issues, increased levels of stress hormones, etc.

## Challenge

Since stress often leads to feelings of negativity, the challenge here is to think about nice things to say to others in differing situations. Reframing your thoughts into a more positive light, even when you are feeling stressed, can help you have more positive interactions with others and can help increase your well-being. Additionally, positive interactions with others can help calm down our anxiety, lower heart rate, decrease blood pressure, and decrease the levels of stress hormones in the body (1).

## Reflect



## Love Yourself

### Did you know?

Stress can often lead to negative thoughts about oneself and it can condition fear which can lead to a lack of confidence in oneself. Negative thinking can often lead to increased levels of depression, anxiety, and worrying.

### Challenge

In your own time, write a love letter to yourself. You should write in-depth about all the qualities that you love about yourself. Embrace yourself within these words and these feelings. When one has high feelings of love and acceptance, this can often evaporate any feelings of stress that manifest from fear of unknown situations. The body will react accordingly and help produce hormones that will get rid of the stress hormones that have been produced (1).

### Reflect

# Recenter Yourself

"Not only does my mind wonder, sometimes it walks off completely"

## Did you know?

As students, our minds tend to wander off and drift away from us at times due to numerous factors such as the demands put on us by others, the commitments we make through our schooling or our jobs, social media, and all of the noise of life competing for our attention.

## Challenge

To increase the levels of presence within yourself, start with closing your eyes. If your thoughts continue drifting away due to excessive noise or responsibilities, shift your attention to yourself and away from your surroundings. Intentionally feel all of your attention shift towards yourself and utilize your center of focus as a way to help you feel calmer. This will help the outside noises lose their meaning. Keep yourself in this state of mind for about 5 to 10 minutes. Recentering to yourself, rather than others can help energize you towards being present within yourself which can consequently help you feel calmer and more empowered (1).

## Reflect



## Building up your Reflection

"You ARE worthy!"

### Did you know?

When there are certain areas where we're struggling, we often need some building up mentally. When we don't have that way to build ourselves up, we can often open the door to tearing ourselves down which can destroy our self-confidence and lead to learned helplessness.

### Challenge

When you are alone and have access to a mirror, look at yourself square in the eyes and start cheering yourself on with whatever area you need building up. Repeat whatever chant that you develop. When starting, the chant may be hard to believe at first, but keep repeating that chant. Speaking more positively and happily can help people feel better about themselves and help them start to believe in the chant. Speaking more positively gives way to more good feelings and decreases the negative impacts of stress (1).

### Reflect

# Fly to the Moon

"Get out of your own world!"

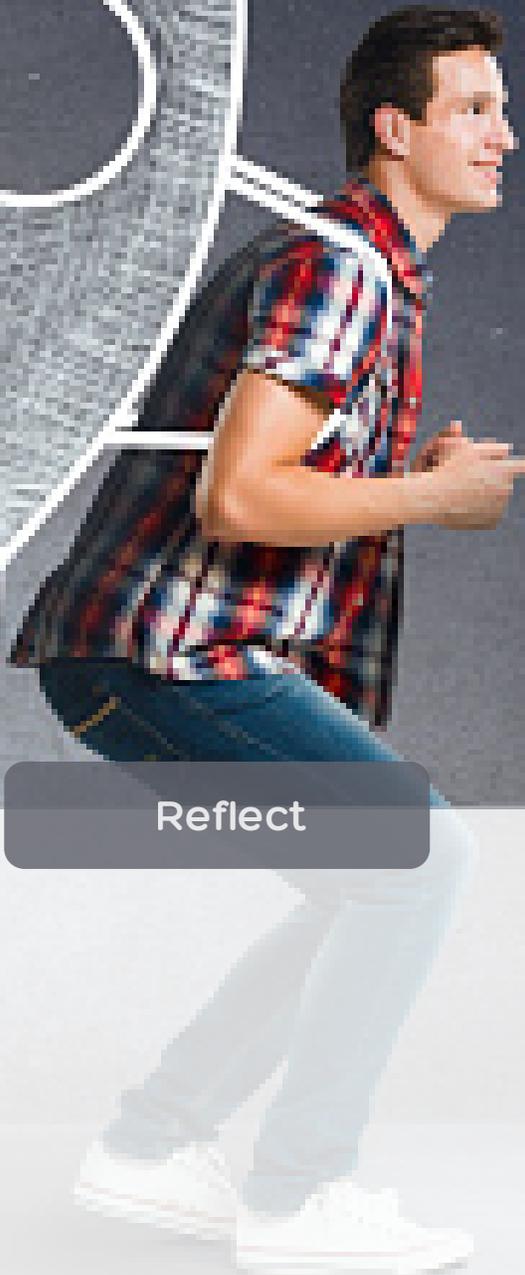
## Did you know?

Stress and anxiety can often bring us up close and personal with everything going on in our lives. The stress and anxiety that we are experiencing can often cloud our judgment and implement limits on how we view these specific situations and lead to us viewing these situations negatively.

## Challenge

For about 5-10 minutes, close your eyes and imagine that you are in a spaceship flying to the moon, going above where you are now and seeing everything from up above. The higher up that you go, the smaller all of these situations in your life will appear. Look at where you were when you were at ground level up. How does everything look from up high? How do you feel about the distance from you and your situation? The closer you are, the more intense the reaction you may have to a situation but the further you separate yourself from those situations, the smaller they appear. As these situations become smaller, these negative reactions will lessen (1).

## Reflect



# The Power of "NO"

"It's okay to say no"

## Did you know?

At times we tend to overbook ourselves by saying "yes" to too many things that we can't commit to. Setting boundaries helps you let yourself know what you can handle and set up expectations for other people about what you can and can't do. A lack of healthy boundaries can lead to feelings of being overwhelmed, depleted, and resentful and can ultimately lead to a lack of healthy life balance.

## Challenge

Be assertive in setting boundaries. Say yes or no confidently and truly to others. Additionally, you should be ok with other people saying no to you. Be patient when people push back at you saying no, but stand by your decision firmly when questioned by others. Empower yourself to establish these healthy boundaries to improve the management of mental health symptoms. Setting healthy boundaries can help you avoid burnout, gain more independence, enhance well-being, and help you focus on yourself and your own needs (2).

## Reflect

A close-up photograph of a hand with light-colored nail polish holding a large, black, three-dimensional 'NO' sign. The sign is slightly tilted and appears to be made of a thick material like cardboard or foam. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.



# Confidently voice your needs

"Nobody can make you feel inferior without  
your consent"

## Did you know?

If you want optimal performance from yourself in school and other areas of your life, you need to clearly state your priorities and make sure they are being met. Sometimes it can feel like you're being stepped on or walked over. If you wait for others to recognize your needs, you will often be waiting a lot longer than you want to, which can increase levels of anxiety, stress, and frustration.

## Challenge

Evaluate the things that you want and need and set specific goals for how you can achieve these things. Voice these needs clearly and unapologetically to faculty members, colleagues, or whoever it's intended for. Stating your wants and needs unapologetically helps with decreasing anxiety, decreasing depression, improving self-esteem, and improving self-worth. This exercise can help you become more assertive with your needs when talking to others (3).

## Reflection



## Limit social media use

"My phone doesn't own me, I own my phone."

### Did you know?

Social media is often a double-edged sword. While social media can be great for things like marketing and bringing awareness to certain issues, it can often become a rabbit hole of toxicity. Excessive social media exposure can often open the door to unhealthy comparisons about where you are in life versus somebody who isn't in graduate school (trust me, I've been there). Spending over 3 hours on social media a day has been linked to higher levels of depression and anxiety, and lower levels of self-esteem.

### Challenge

Limit your social media use to just 30 minutes a day. You can begin limiting social media by scheduling specific times to check up on social media but no longer than 30 minutes a day. Additionally, I recommend padding your social media feeds with content that is uplifting to you. This can help you improve your time management skills, lower levels of stress, anxiety, or depression, and decrease your fear of missing out. All of this can ultimately increase your self-esteem (4).

### Reflect

# Stop Catastrophizing

"The issue is not the problem but the incredible amount of overthinking done because of the problem"

## Did you know?

Catastrophizing is when we are faced with unfamiliar situations and assume that the worst possible thing that could happen will happen. We can often jump to these conclusions without any base to support these ways of thinking. When we experience catastrophizing thoughts, our thoughts are often out of proportion to the reality of the situations we face. Catastrophizing can lead to anxiety disorders and feelings of hopelessness which often manifests in depression (5).

## Challenge

Put a stop to catastrophizing. You can begin this by focusing on your initial thoughts to bring awareness to them. Bringing awareness to catastrophic thoughts is the first step in allowing us to recognize when these conclusions that we are drawing are exaggerated or unsupported by facts but more by fear. From there, try to reframe these thoughts towards more realistic ones about the situation at hand (For example: when you don't do well on a test, instead of saying "I suck" or "I'm going to fail this class", say "This wasn't my best but I can do better next time."). Even if a situation is unpleasant or unfamiliar, it is more than likely that you are capable of getting through that situation (7). Reframing these thoughts allows us to become more aware of this unhealthy way of thinking and helps us decrease our self-limiting language can help lower anxiety and depression (6).

## Reflection



# Improve your sleeping habits

"Sleep is the best meditation"



10

## Did you know?

We often live in a society that channels the saying "You can sleep when you're dead". However, the truth is that consistently failing to get a decent amount of sleep (7-8 hours per night) can have negative effects. Consistently poor sleeping habits can lead to decreased memory, difficulties with thinking and concentrating, mood swings, anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts.

## Challenge

Look at your habits and routines before you go to bed and establish a better bedtime routine if the routine that you currently have is not effective. Even small changes such as going to bed earlier or just limiting the amount of screen time before bed can make a significant difference in the quality of sleep. Bedtime routines are not a one-size-fits-all approach which is why it is important to figure out what routine works the best for you. Improving your quality of sleep can help you decrease anxiety and depression, improve concentration and productivity, improve memory, and can improve your overall immune system (8).

## Reflection

# Take a walk

"Walking is the exact balance between spirit and humility"

## Did you know?

Our generation has become increasingly reliant on technology for many facets of our lives. Because of this increased reliance on technology for many things, including entertainment, we don't spend as much time in the natural outside world despite all the evidence that shows how beneficial it is as it's shown to be a powerful antidepressant.

## Challenge

Take 15-30 minutes (longer if you need it) to take a break from what you're doing and walk around your neighborhood, park, or wherever to help reset your mind and focus, take in all the sights and sounds, and recenter your focus. Exposure to our natural world, as previously mentioned, has an array of benefits for our mental health. Some additional benefits include improve concentration, decreased stress, and anxiety, more positive social interactions, and improved sense of purpose in life (9).

## Reflection



# 5-4-3-2-1 grounding

"Empty yourself and let the universe fill you.."

## Did you know?

During graduate school, we can often face several stressful situations (i.e. clinical rotations, practical's, final exams, licensure exams, etc.). These events and the other things we face in graduate school can even make the calmest of us feel a little more stressed and anxious and impact our levels of concentration. Feeling like these events are out of our control can also lead to episodes of depression.

## Challenge

Take some time to ground yourself into the present moment. Begin by naming five things around you that you see. Next, name four things that you feel. Then, list three things that you hear. Then, list two things that you can smell. Finally, list one thing that you can taste (10). Grounding yourself utilizing this technique can help you decrease your levels of anxiety and stress surrounding these stressful situations and help slow down racing thoughts that are often associated with these situations (11).

## Reflection

# Prioritize yourself

"An empty lantern provides no light. Self-care is the fuel that allows your light to shine brightly."

## Did you know?

It is common in graduate school for our lives to feel out of balance and to think that we don't have time to spend on ourselves and increase balance. On average, people only spend about 15 minutes a day on self-care related to one's health. Lack of self-care can lead to increased levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and leave one person feeling completely drained (14).

## Challenge

Make it a point in your daily schedule to take 30 minutes (more if needed) for yourself to do an activity that brings you joy. Taking time out of your day helps improve your level of occupational balance. Occupational balance can be described as the contribution of occupations to a more fully functional and well-balanced lifestyle or to a lifestyle that is currently out of balance and distinguished by occupational dysfunction (12). Occupations are things we want to do, have to do, and need to do. According to research, the strongest correlation to empowerment is engagement in valued occupations (13). Additionally, increasing balance through taking time for yourself can help decrease anxiety, stress, and depression (15).

## Reflection

# EFT Tapping

"You don't have to solve it, only evolve it."



## Did you know?

At times anxiety can consume us. Living with persistent anxiety can lead to even more significant problems as time passes. Persistent anxiety can cause a sense of doom making it difficult to concentrate on daily tasks. Persistent anxiety can lead to an increased risk for depression, headaches, feelings of irritability, and increased fatigue throughout the course of the day (17).

## Challenge

Please scan this QR Code or URL above to utilize this exercise for Emotional freedom technique (EFT) Tapping.

A study comparing EFT tapping to other forms of treatment demonstrated significant decreases in anxiety scores from the patients who received EFT tapping as a form of treatment. Advocates for EFT tapping state that it helps you acquire your body's energy and send signals to the amygdala which is an area of the brain responsible for controlling stress (16). These advocates state that catalyzing the meridian points through EFT tapping can help reduce stress or negative emotion you feel from whatever issues you are experiencing, which can help revitalize balance in your energy after a potential disruption (18).



## Reflection

# Autogenic training

"Do what you can, with what you've got,  
where you are ."

## Did you know?

At times anxiety can consume us. Living with persistent anxiety can lead to even bigger problems as time passes. Persistent anxiety can cause a sense of doom which can make it difficult to concentrate. Persistent anxiety can additionally lead to an increased risk for depression, headaches, feelings of irritability, and increased levels of fatigue through the course of the day (20).



## Challenge

Use this QR Code or URL above to engage in autogenic training.

Autogenic training is a technique of relaxation which focuses on promoting calm feelings in the body and helps decrease levels of stress and anxiety. Autogenic training specifically helps with alleviating levels of anxieties coming from certain situations which can overwhelm individuals with sadness, frustration, or stress. A systematic review of studies determined that autogenic training could lead to consistent and significant reductions in symptoms of anxiety. Autogenic training has shown to be beneficial in helping people manage everyday stressors and improve psychological well-being (19).

## Reflection

## Write it Down!

"When you write you use the logical side of your brain instead of the emotional side. This can help you better understand the reasons why you are having these feelings"

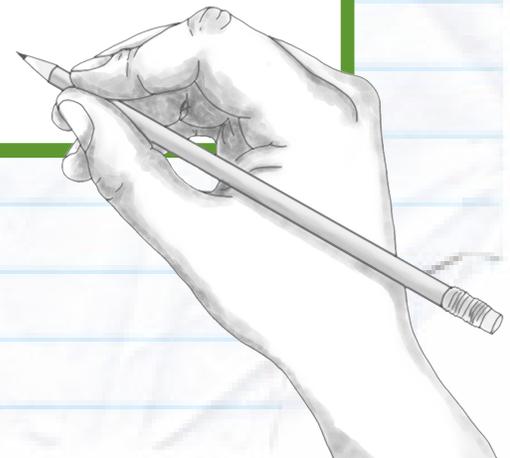
### Did you know?

Graduate school can be riddled with moments of anxiety and stress and sometimes we may bottle up our emotions until they bubble up to the surface and everything comes out. This isn't a healthy way to deal with how we are feeling in these moments. Additionally, it can lead to more negative thoughts developing in our heads where we overthink things.

### Challenge

Set 5-10 minutes aside to journal your thoughts and feelings about what's going on and how it makes you feel. Be completely honest with everything you write down and don't hold anything back. Journaling has been shown through research to be an effective way to help clear and calm their minds, help release any feelings that may be pent up, and help people let go of any negative thoughts that they may be experiencing. Engaging in journaling often can help people foster personal growth and help them develop healthier coping mechanisms (21).

### Reflect



## List your behavioral "ABC's"

"Life is 10% what happens to you and  
90% of how you react to it"

### Did you know?

A lot of times we can't change anything that is happening around us, we can only control how we react to the situation that we are facing. To change the way we think and behave towards negative situations, we need to understand what prompted this behavior (antecedent), understand how we act in these situations (behavior), and understand what happens because of our behaviors (consequence).

### Challenge

List the ABCs of a negative situation in your own life and using this situation (antecedent) determine how you can change your reaction to something more positive (behavior) and see how your new reaction changes the outcome (consequence).

Incorporating more positive reactions to whatever the situation presents can help you decrease the levels of stress and anxiety over the things that are out of your control and helps you see the consequences of thinking negatively (22).

### Reflect

## Practice self-kindness

"Don't beat yourself up, that's the worst defeat you will ever suffer"

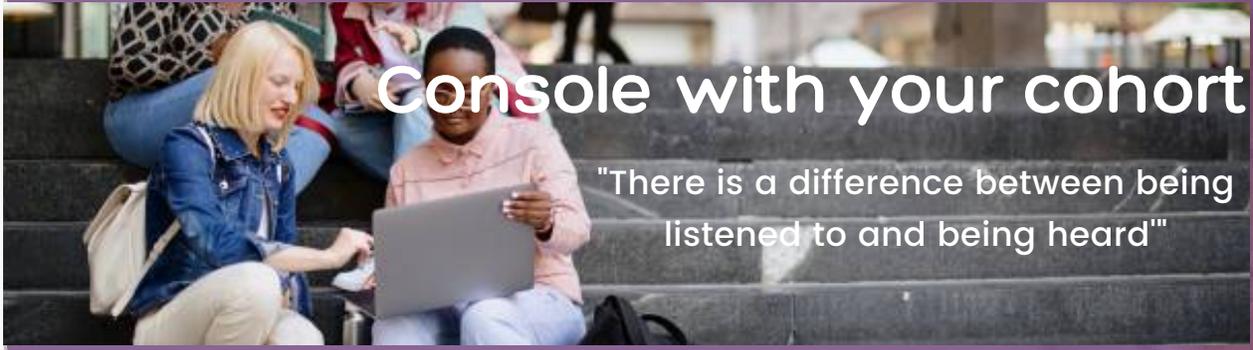
### Did you know?

There are times in our lives when a lot of us become our toughest critics (I am especially guilty of this). As much as our feedback may intend to motivate us, it can often wreak havoc on our minds, self-esteem, and our motivation. Continued harsh and negative thoughts about oneself can often lead to self-fulfilling prophecies of failure (23).

### Challenge

Take 5-10 minutes out of your day (whenever most convenient) to speak or write out positive thoughts about yourself. Changing the way you think or speak about yourself can help you stimulate parts of the brain which help initiate more positive health changes. Additionally, repeating these positive and kind affirmations about yourself can help improve your motivation levels, increase productivity levels, and overcome bad habits (23).

### Reflect



## Console with your cohort

"There is a difference between being listened to and being heard"

### Did you know?

Graduate school is hard and sometimes you need someone to talk to about these experiences. A lot of times, we resort to talking to our families about it and they give us advice that, while well intentioned (i.e. take it one day at a time), can often lead to feelings of not being heard which can increase your levels of stress, frustration, and anxiety. While your family means well, they don't understand and won't understand what you are going through in graduate school.

### Challenge

I want to start by disclaiming that I am not saying to avoid talking to your families about graduate school. What I recommend instead is venting to your classmates about the things you are experiencing. Your classmates are the only people who understand exactly what you are experiencing as a student in your cohort. Your classmates might be able to offer a fresh perspective on how to approach the experiences that your cohort is requiring of you (24). These interactions can help decrease a sense of loneliness, help you feel validated and heard, and potentially empower you towards having a new take on whatever situations are presented to you and your cohort (24).

### Reflect

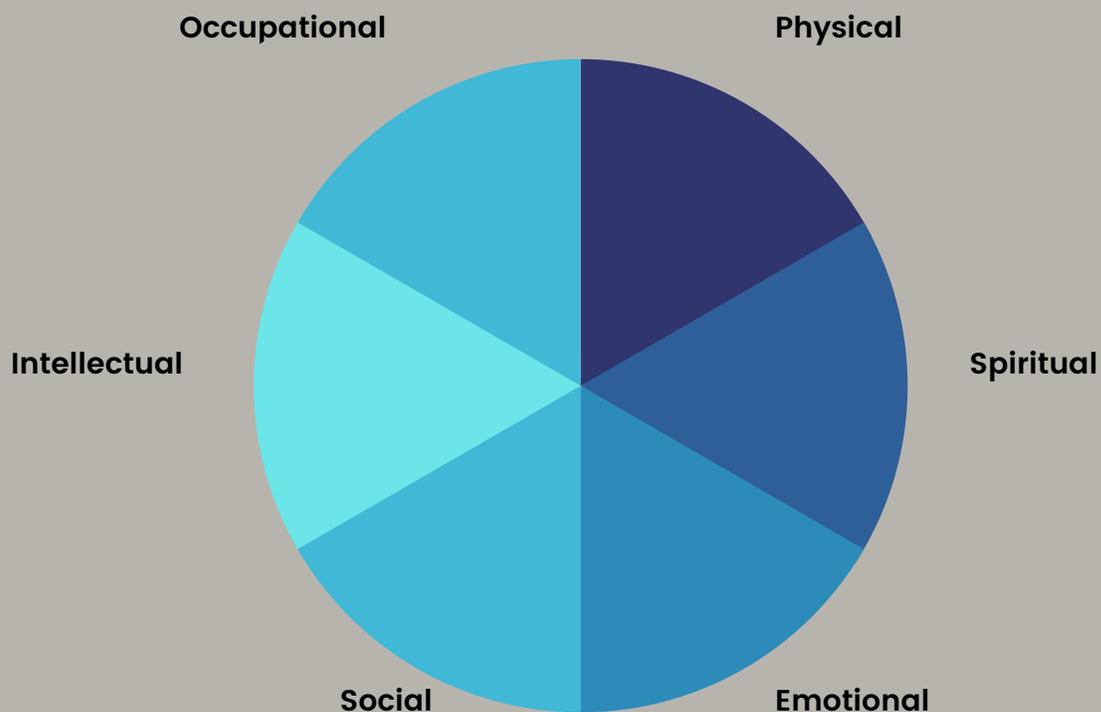
# Develop your wellness wheel

20

"There is a difference between being listened to and being heard"

## Did you know?

In life, it often becomes difficult to practice wellness. Wellness is a lifestyle approach to managing health (25). The Wellness Wheel embraces health as the collective sum of our occupational (life roles/leisure activities), physical, social, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual well-being. A lot of times this wheel can be out of balance because we put too much emphasis on one area of the wheel and disregard other areas which can create more stress or anxiety because we feel this state of disequilibrium.



## Challenge

On a separate sheet of paper, develop your own wellness wheel, discuss how you are meeting or not meeting your wellness needs in each dimension of the wheel. Create a Goal for each area of wellness (occupational, physical, social, intellectual, emotional, spiritual). Having an increased sense of balance throughout our lives can help increase our wellness by decreasing stress and reducing the risk of burnout (25).

# Initiate the relaxation response

"Relax you are only doing your best"

## Did you know?

You all have probably heard of the sympathetic nervous system response "Fight, flight, or freeze response" which is how our bodies react to stress. These sympathetic responses can lead to increased blood pressure, tightening of muscles, shallowing breathing, slowed digestion, and excessive alertness (26).

## Challenge

Activate your relaxation response. You will want to begin by sitting in a comfortable position and place where you won't be interrupted for 15 minutes. Close your eyes and pick a word that has a positive meaning for you and focus on this word. This can help replace random thoughts and worries in your mind. Slowly breathe in through your nose and take a few seconds to breathe out. While breathing, continue focusing on this positive word. I would recommend doing this exercise a few times a week. Initiating this relaxation response can help with lowering blood pressure, calming the mind, slowing down breathing, and relaxing your muscles (26).

## Reflect

## Letting go of worrying

"Don't worry about a thing. Cause every little thing, is gonna be all right."

### Did you know?

People can often lack the awareness of how many things they are worried about and how this excessive worrying can take a major toll on our mental health. Excessive levels of stress and worrying can lead to dizziness, rapid breathing, muscle tension, irritability, and decrease concentration (27).

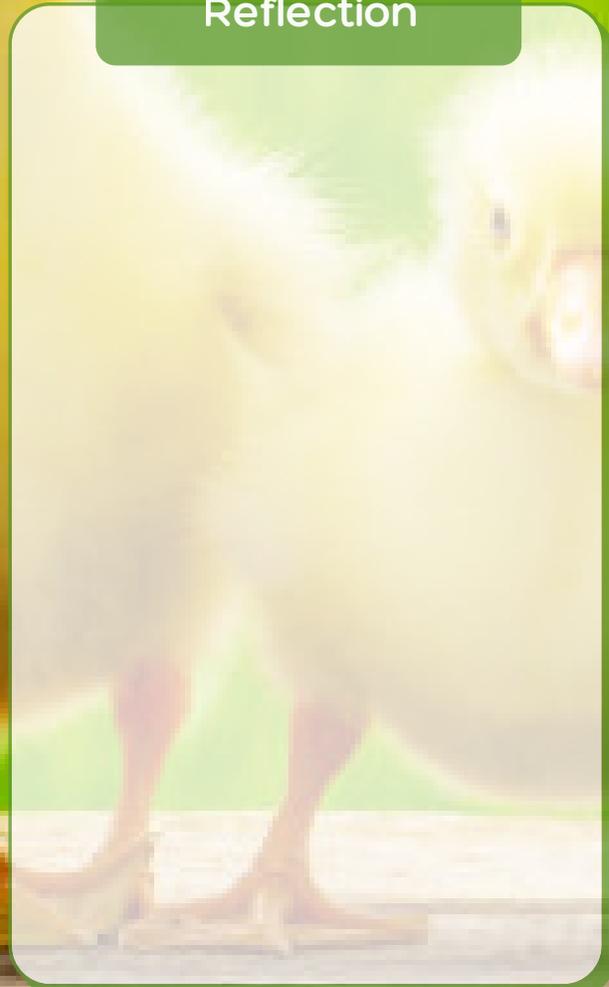
### Challenge

Make a list of things you are currently worried about and pick one thing that you are worried about and answer yes or no to the following questions:

- Is this very important to me?
- Do I have control of this?
- Have I exercised control over this? If yes, there's nothing more you can do and if no, why not and how can I utilize my control of this situation.

If you answered no to question 1, state why you are worried about this and what you can do when you are worried about this. If you answered no to question number 2, determine whether you can gain control over this situation. If the answer to this question is yes, determine how you can take control by identifying realistic steps and goals to gain control. If the answer is no, re-evaluate if there is anything you can do to change the situation. If the answer remains no, determine how you can surrender your worrying. Learning how to surrender control to the worries that aren't important and taking charge of the ones we can control helps us to develop better coping mechanisms when facing moments of stress, worrying, and anxiety (28).

### Reflection



# Let go of anger

"It's always okay to take time for yourself  
and your mental health"

## Did you know?

It's okay to get angry, everyone gets angry sometimes. When anger is managed well, it can help with influencing positive changes. However, if anger is not managed well, it can lead to many issues. Some of the effects that unmanaged anger can have on the body can include but are not limited to headaches, high blood pressure, depression, and increased blood pressure which can increase the likelihood of having a heart attack or a stroke. Repressing anger is not healthy either because this can lead to increases in anxiety or depression (30).

### Challenge

Access this QR Code to engage in a guided meditation to help with letting go of angry thoughts.



Meditation can decrease the physiological arousal to anger and is related to autonomic regulation. Decreasing the physiological reactivity to negative emotions could be a potential tool where mindfulness can help regulate negative emotional experiences such as anger. Research studies have shown that meditation helps with developing mindfulness-related changes in areas of the brain responsible for emotional experience and emotional regulation (31, 32).

### Reflection

## Revise your goals

"We need positive and realistic goals and the willingness to work. Hard work and practical goals."

### Did you know?

A lot of times, we can find ourselves overworking ourselves trying to meet goals that we set for ourselves. When we have trouble reaching those goals, our solution is often to try harder. When trying harder still doesn't help us achieve our goals, it can cause us to go down a rabbit hole of depression and hopelessness and decrease our energy and motivation (33).

### Challenge

If you find that your goals are difficult to reach even with increased effort, it's probably time to revise your goals. For goals to be more attainable, I recommend utilizing the SMART goal format. The SMART goal format means that your goals should be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-based. Revising goals into a SMART format can help you increase your energy and motivation by making these goals more realistic to your ability. The more goals we meet, the more productive we feel, and the more empowered we feel towards making changes that will last (34).

### Reflection

## Challenge negative thoughts

"Whether you think you can or can't, you're right."

### Did you know?

Oftentimes we can view ourselves and everything around us in negative ways. These often irrational negative feelings can lead to symptoms of anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues. If these negative thoughts persist, they can often lead to prophecies of failure.

### Challenge

To reverse these negative thoughts, one thing we can do is directly challenge these thoughts. With each negative thought, you should see if there is substantial evidence to support this negative thought. Then you should find evidence that challenges and contradicts that thought so you can look at this thought with all of the evidence (36). Finally, consider how this situation would differ from thinking positively about it. Turning these negative thoughts into positive ones can help you reduce rates of depression and anxiety, improve coping skills during difficult situations, and improve your overall well-being (35).

### Reflection

## Find your flow

"Control of consciousness determines the quality of life."

### Did you know?

Do you have an activity that you become completely immersed in whenever you participate in it? Is it an activity you love to do that is neither too easy nor too hard? This activity probably puts you in a state of flow. When an activity brings us to a state of flow, the activity completely immerses us in it. In flow activities, we aren't exerting too much or too little effort (37). People can experience flow from different things (i.e. For me that activity is basketball).

### Challenge

Find an activity that immerses you into that state of flow and take time out of your day (at least 10-15 minutes) to participate in this activity. This activity should also give you immediate feedback and should allow you to block out any outside distractions. Engaging in activities that help you experience flow can help improve your levels of emotional regulation, improve levels of happiness, and increase intrinsic motivation (37). Finding flow is similar to the "Just-right challenge" in occupational therapy.

### Reflection

## Create a thought log

"Our key to transforming anything lies within our ability to reframe it."

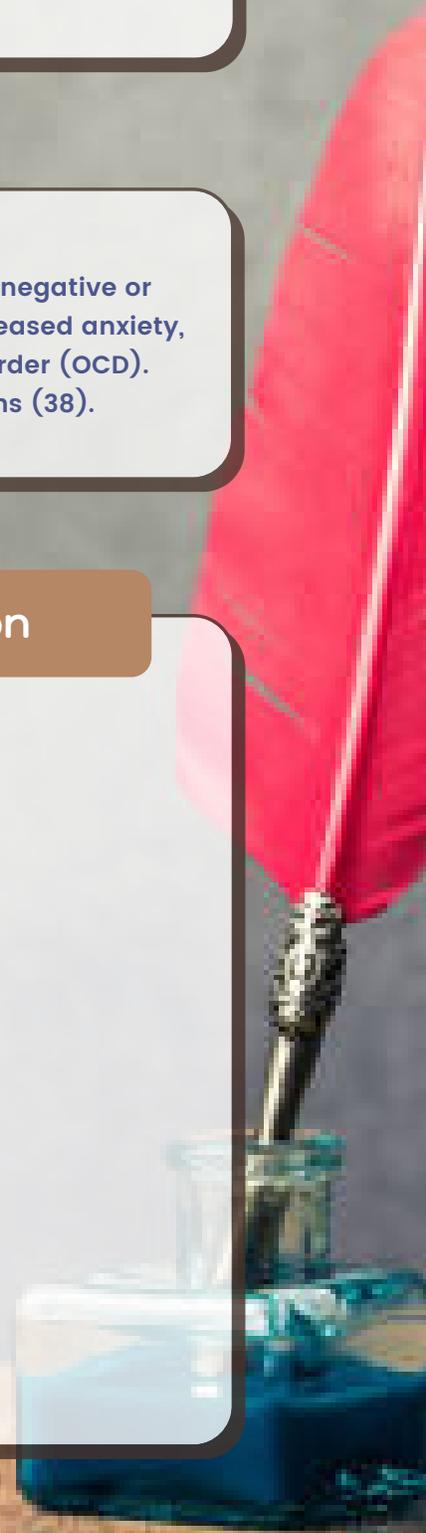
### Did you know?

We all have situations where we view the things that are happening as negative or unhelpful. This type of negative and unhelpful thinking can lead to increased anxiety, increased depression, and is often linked to obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). These symptoms often cloud the way we look at these types of situations (38).

### Challenge

Create a thought log where you can list these situations and the physical and emotional feelings associated with this situation. Determine the thoughts and behaviors that are mainly unhelpful to you. Find alternative thoughts and behaviors that can help you view the situation in a different light. Finally, determine how you are feeling after writing and experiencing these alternative thoughts and behaviors. Thought logs can help us in seeing and identifying our automatic negative thoughts and any distortions in our ways of thinking. Restructuring how we think about and view these situations can help us decrease the levels of anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues associated with how we negatively view situations (38).

### Reflection



# Box Breathing

"When life feels out of focus, return to the basics, no breath, no life."

## Did you know?

There are times in graduate school when things just feel completely overwhelming. When things appear to be overwhelming, it can lead to an increased sense of stress, anxiety, and panic. This can potentially lead to exacerbated worrying which can ultimately lead to a heightened sense of anxiety and impending doom. Excessively anxious people can often turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms (Alcohol, drugs, overeating, undereating, etc.) (39).

## Challenge

In any place, comfortable try to start box breathing to attempt recentering yourself. Begin by breathing in slowly and counting to four. Next, hold your breath for roughly four seconds without inhaling or exhaling in these seconds. Then, exhale slowly through your mouth for roughly four seconds. Repeat this cycle of inhaling, holding your breath, and exhaling for as long as you need until you feel recentered. Box breathing is an evidence-based technique that helps reduce levels of stress and helps with optimizing readiness and performance in these stressful situations (40).

## Reflection

# Develop an action list

"Action is the foundational key to all success."

## Did you know?

Lots of us develop to-do lists in our daily lives. While to-do lists are better than nothing with trying to be productive and get things done, the results can often be a mixed bag. One of the reasons for this is that these tasks are often not prioritized in any specific order. This lack of prioritization can lead to us choosing the easier tasks first to try and knock those out instead of the difficult tasks. Difficult tasks typically aren't broken down into steps of how to complete them which makes it more about whether the task got accomplished or not. We also tend to add to our to-do list throughout the day which becomes counterintuitive and makes us feel less productive which can lead to higher levels of stress or depression (41).

# ACTION

# PLAN

## Challenge

Develop an action list. Start by listing a few actions that are of a high priority to you. This step will help you think about what the most important thing is for you to get done at this time and what steps you can take towards getting closer to completing that task if it's not a one-day thing. Make your action list about just 3-5 actions and know that you can always do more things once those actions have been completed. Make these actions small things that can be done in less than an hour. The idea is to aim low so that whatever projects you're working on are more manageable and help you get more things done. Implementing an action list can help with making projects more manageable, decrease anxiety, it can help us organize our thoughts better, and empowers us to take action on our bigger projects in steps and become more goal-oriented (42).

## Reflection

# Gratitude journaling

"Every day may not be good, but there's something good in every day."

## Did you know?

A lot of times in graduate school, we can find ourselves in challenging times and situations. When we are in the midst of these situations, we can often get fixated on certain things which are displeasing to us. This type of thinking leads us down a rabbit hole of negativity. Negative thinking can often be linked to depression, anxiety, stress, and obsessive worrying (43).

## Challenge

Take a few minutes out of your day to journal things you are grateful for. Write down how you will make today a good day and list some positive affirmations for yourself. Finally, write down things that made your day and list what you have learned from today. According to research, gratitude journaling can help students with their perspective, emotional, and behavioral aspects of their lives while navigating the challenges of their education (44). Additionally, gratitude journaling can assist them with managing levels of stress. People with a higher grateful temperament who perceive their experiences positively can be accredited to helping other people and reacting graciously and other positive emotions, which can help contribute to high interpersonal capability. Finally, practicing gratitude can help advance a person's perceived levels of satisfaction in life and happiness (45).

## Reflection

# Celebrate small victories

"Track your small wins to motivate big accomplishments".

## Did you know?

A lot of times in life, we work towards big goals. While these big goals are important to you, it's a big journey to obtain these goals. In our pursuit of achieving these large goals, with small everyday wins, we can become disappointed if we are progressing slowly towards our goals. While progress towards our goals can often seem slow or gradual, it is important to recognize that this progress means getting closer to achieving your goals (43).

## Challenge

Celebrate small victories, you're doing great! Even if your progress seems small, it is still progress and should be recognized. Celebrating small wins can help increase dopamine levels in your brain which ultimately can help increase motivation (47). A lot of small progress can lead to greater results down the line. Additionally, improving our perception of our progress can enhance our overall motivation, provide us with a greater sense of accomplishment, improve our perspective, and increase our quality of life (46).

## Reflection

# Let go of guilt

"Let go of self condemnation and guilt ."

Did you know?

We live in a society that preaches work, work, work. Oftentimes, this same society conditions us towards guilt when we need a break. Because of this guilt, this can often lead to an excessive workload where we work longer hours than we are humanly capable of doing and this can lead to a bunch of issues. These issues include, but certainly aren't limited to burnout, exhaustion, anxiety, difficulty concentrating, and excessive worrying (48).



## Challenge

Let go of all of your guilt associated with taking a break. Taking a break can help reset your mood and reduce your levels of stress which can help improve your levels of productivity. Additionally, taking a break can help increase your levels of psychological wellness, and research supports taking breaks throughout the day, as it is shown to recharge your mind and can help with improving your creativity levels with the change of scenery (49). Finally, letting go of the guilt associated can help with lowering the levels of stress and anxiety that you may be experiencing (48).

## Reflection

# Don't should yourself

"Believing in the negative is the greatest obstruction to success ."

## Did you know?

A lot of people use should or should not statements as a way to motivate themselves and as a way to set forth external expectations for themselves. These statements are often utilized in a way as if you were going to be punished before being expected to do anything. Using a "should" statement can often be a false motivator which can lead to associations of guilt when we're not meeting expectations. Not meeting these "shoulds" can lead to an increased sense of fear and worry or feeling like a failure (50).



## Challenge

Don't use should statements. One thing we say instead of saying "I should be doing this" is to say "It would be helpful or unhelpful to do this." Finding your priorities and figuring out what is helpful or unhelpful can lead to having a greater sense of motivation (51). Life happens and we don't always have the time to be doing the things that we "should" be doing and it is okay to give yourself some slack to relax and lessen that internalized pressure that comes from these statements (51).

## Reflection

A large, empty, light gray rounded rectangular box intended for reflection notes.

# Be conscious of mental health language

"The only journey is the journey within ."

## Did you know?

There is a massive stigma that surrounds mental health. This stigma often puts labels on people who are experiencing mental health struggles with words such as "dangerous", "crazy", "unhinged", etc. Due to these labels, it is understandable why people often struggle to seek help with mental health due to this stigma surrounding mental health struggles. Research states that a growing number of people struggling with mental health issues also have high amounts of internalized stigma which can develop negative stereotypes about what they're experiencing (53). Embracing these negative stereotypes about mental health struggles can not only make it less likely for people to seek help, but it can generate negative implicit beliefs, which affect their quality of life and often lead to self-fulfilling prophecies of failure (52).

## Challenge

Change the way you talk about mental health and use more respectful language if you don't already because the way we word mental health makes a big difference. The next time you hear somebody talking about mental health using negatively stigmatizing words, correct them to use more respectful words when describing individuals who are struggling with theirs. This can be done by using person-first language ( i.e. saying a person with mental health struggles instead of a mental person). Using more respectful person-first language when discussing mental health can help normalize mental health and help with breaking down the stigma surrounding mental health struggles (54). Using better language when discussing mental health allows us to support our mental health along with supporting the mental health of those who may be fighting a mental health battle quietly (55).

## Reflection

Words Have Power

# Challenge mental health narratives

36

"Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored"

## Did you know?

There are a lot of false public narratives about mental health that influence our knowledge regarding mental health. These narratives often lead to an increase in the stigma surrounding mental health. These narratives can often come from the film industry which often portrays individuals struggling with mental health in numerous negative ways such as being incompetent, needing to be removed from society, and being seen as "loony" (57). Additionally, with stigma being so deeply ingrained into our culture when it comes to mental health, this can lead to policies and legislation which can silence the voices of people suffering from mental health struggles. While things have gotten better in recent years, there is still work which needs to be done (56).

## Challenge

Write your thoughts and preconceived notions down about people with a mental illness and people who struggle with managing their mental health. Do your research on mental health difficulties and determine how the facts may differ from what you may have thought about mental health difficulties. Finding out the facts regarding mental health difficulties and challenging these false narratives is a way that we can help normalize discussing mental health (58). Additionally, getting the facts about mental health difficulties can get people to reduce the shame associated with their struggles with mental health and help them get the help they need. After all, everybody deserves peace in their mind (58).

## Reflection

A large banner with the word "MYTHS" written on it, set against a blue sky background. The banner is white with the word in large, bold, black letters. The banner is hanging from a structure, and the background is a clear blue sky with some white clouds. The banner is slightly tilted, and the word "MYTHS" is the central focus of the image.

# Share your struggles

"Everybody has problems and learning to share them is essential"

## Did you know?

I remember times in my program here at Touro when I felt that I had no time for literally anything else. I was solely focused on school and took no time to do any of the other things I needed to do. I was headed on a path to burnout and felt like I couldn't tell anybody, not even my wife. I got to a point where I was so heavily affected by stress and anxiety that my whole body got dizzy and felt heavy when I stood up. From this experience, I learned that it is important to take breaks for my mental health and that I need to speak up when I'm struggling.

## Challenge

Share your experiences of mental health struggles with trusted people. I recognize that everyone's journey with mental health is vastly different. However, when we feel like we are in the midst of these situations, it is important to speak up and reach out to people we trust. Your feelings are valid and you deserve to have a voice in your experiences. Communicating the feelings effectively can have therapeutic effects on the brain, improve our levels of self-advocacy, and can help with generating open dialogue about mental health (58). Sharing these experiences can help lower the stigma associated with seeking help and make struggling with mental health a less trivial topic (56). Everyone's mental health experience is valid and deserves to be heard if they're struggling (56). Finally, these exercises can help aid you in living a more empowered life through owning your story and not letting others choose how you view yourself.

## Reflection

# Embrace the other facets

"The only disability is the inability to accept and respect differences"

## Did you know?

As human beings, we are all multifaceted and have many different parts that make us who we are. I'm sure all of you reading this could think of 10 ways to describe yourself and some of your friends and loved ones. As you can see, everybody is so much more than what meets the eye. Categorizing anybody you know into just one category would be a disservice to describing who somebody is. For example, if somebody has diabetes, you don't just think of them as diabetic or someone with cancer as cancer. When labels are provided for individuals experiencing any issue (health-related, mental health, etc.), it limits who they are as human beings and reduces the complexity of their lived experiences. Any diagnosis should not ultimately define one's identity.

## Challenge

Think of somebody who you are close to who has mental health issues or a mental health diagnosis and list 10 adjectives about them or 10 things about them that have nothing to do with their diagnosis. This exercise can help us decrease the labels that we put on people experiencing mental health issues. Recognizing one's identity outside of their struggles or diagnosis helps us humanize these individuals who are experiencing mental health issues and can help lower the stigma associated with mental health issues (59). Finally, recognizing an individual outside of their diagnosis or their struggles can help us embrace these individuals for the complexity of their lived experiences and shed whatever labels are reducing said complexities (59).

## Reflection

# Decompress with Humor

"Laughter gives us distance. It allows us to step back from an event, deal with it, and move on"

## Did you know?

As I have mentioned before, it is okay to be angry sometimes. Often, when anger is healthily managed, it can often be the first step to empowering you towards making positive changes. Conversely, unresolved anger is often associated with bad reactions to anger which can potentially lead to further increases in stress and anxiety. When our sympathetic nervous system (fight, flight, or freeze response) is activated through anger, it can cloud our rationality which, in turn, impacts our ability to cope with anger healthily (60).

## Challenge

Use humor as a way to help release any tension caused by anger. Using humor can help with properly coping with whatever we are angry about. Using humor about the situation can also help you face that thing causing the anger and possibly any unrealistic expectations for how situations should unfold. Disclaimer: Do not use sarcastic humor as this can often harm others and exacerbate feelings of anger (61). Laughing can help increase blood circulation which produces calming sensations and decreases stress levels. Finally, using humor can increase positive thoughts which stimulate the release of neuropeptides, which help combat stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues (61).

## Reflection

# Record an anger diary

"There is nothing wrong with anger provided you use it constructively"

## Did you know?

There are times when anger can seep into our minds and thoughts to the extent that we let that anger take over our thoughts, emotions, and actions. Sometimes our anger does this to our minds before we even realize what's happening. When anger takes over our minds it can impact our ability to rationalize clearly, cope healthily, and our ability to have healthy relationships with other people (62).

## Challenge

At the end of the day or a few hours after the anger has subsided, take a moment to reflect on five moments where you felt really angry or even just a little bit frustrated. Record the situation that triggered each angry reaction, the warning signs that led to the reaction, the reaction itself, and the outcome. Next, look to see if there is a common pattern related to your anger in these scenarios. Then, think about how you would like to react differently to these scenarios in the future. With increased practice utilizing the anger journal, you can improve your ability to catch that anger before it takes over your mind. Documented scenarios in these anger diaries can help provide material allowing you to think differently about anger situations, work through what happened from your perspective, and then explore possible alternative explanations and perspectives on coping with these emotions healthily (62).

## Reflection

# Sphere of control

"There's an important difference between giving up and letting go".

## Did you know?

In life, we can often worry so much about the things we have very little control or influence over. Having such a consistent state of worry can have large negative impacts on your overall wellness. Persistent worrying can lead to restlessness, difficulty sleeping, headaches, and decreased concentration and productivity. Chronic worrying can also be a hallmark sign of generalized anxiety which causes tension and a general sense of unease that has the potential to consume your life if uncontrolled (63).

## Challenge

Establish your sphere of control. Start by naming the situation at hand which is causing you worry or frustration. Next, identify the situations that are outside of your sphere of control. Having a situation outside of your sphere of control means that you have no control or influence over this situation altogether. Now, identify the situations that are within your sphere of control. Situations within your sphere of control are ones that are in our direct control. With the situations in the sphere of control, you can determine the best course of action and do it one step at a time. When finding the best course of action, answer the following questions: What actions can be taken here? What can be done to prepare for this situation if it happens again? How may you react if this situation manifests itself again?. This exercise can help us focus our energy on the things within our control so we improve the level of impact in our daily lives. This additionally helps us manage persistent anxiety and worrying by looking at exactly what we can do in each situation, improving our levels of resilience (64).

## Reflection

# Socratic questioning

"I shall never fear or avoid things of which I do not know".

## Did you know?

Negative thinking and persistent worrying can lead to our future appearing rather grim. We can reassure ourselves that things are fine and that we're going to be alright. But the more we rely on reassurance, the more worried we will ultimately become. Negative thoughts can ultimately lead to a low sense of self-worth and feelings of ineffectiveness. Psychologists have even linked persistent negative thinking to anxiety, depression, and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) (65).

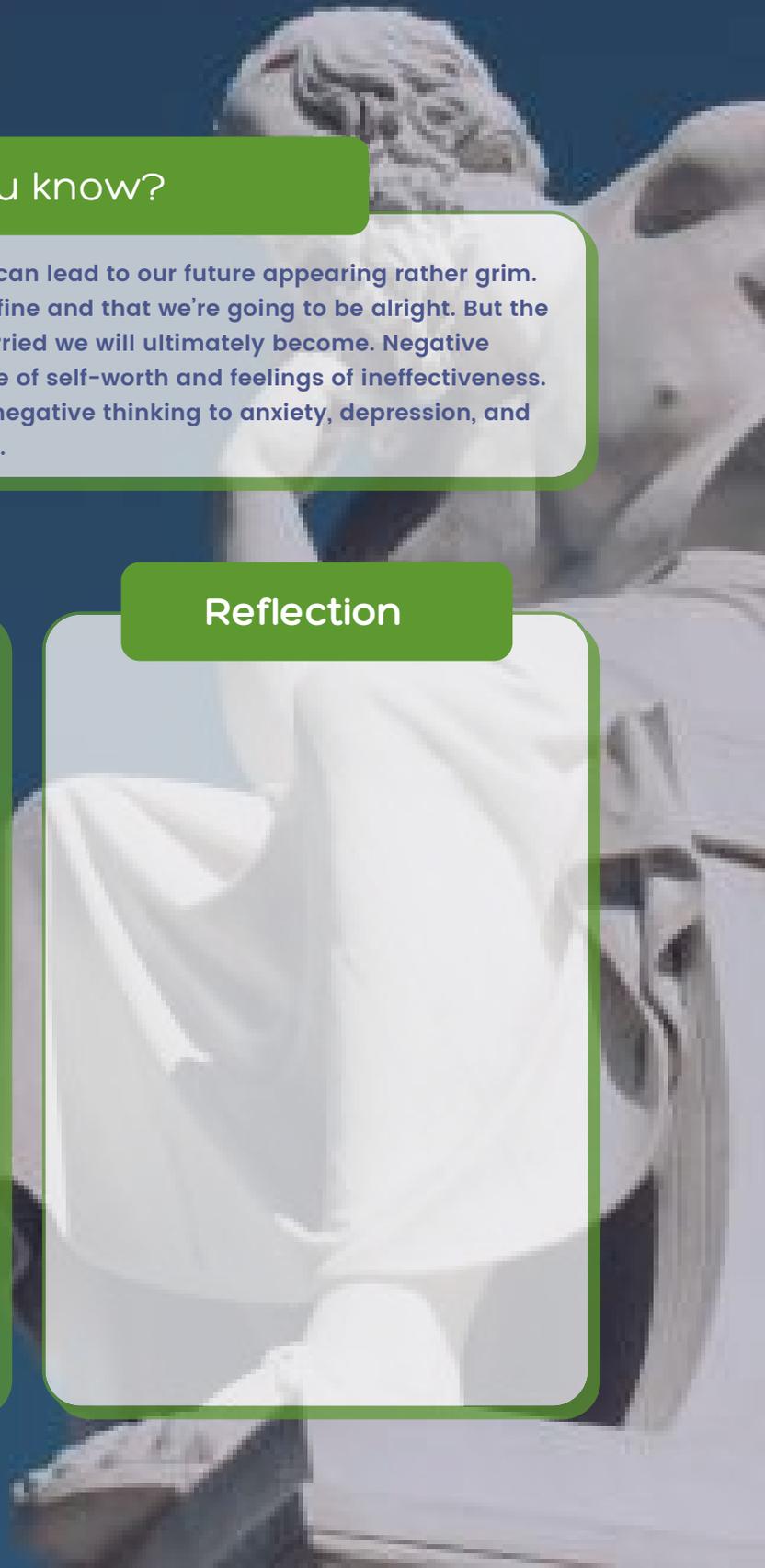
## Challenge

Provide yourself with Socratic questioning. Some Socratic questions involve the following questions:

- Is this thought realistic?
- Are these thoughts based on facts or feelings?
- Am I viewing this from a black and white way?
- If I were in someone else's shoes, how would they think about this?
- Could I be misinterpreting the evidence?

Socratic questioning helps with generating active engagement and critical thinking, thereby which helps generate alternative beliefs (66). Utilizing Socratic questioning has been emphasized by experts as an approach that helps people take new perspectives, develop more effective coping skills, and begin to see improvement in mental health symptoms such as depression and anxiety (65). Socratic questioning encourages deep dives into our thoughts and offers us the opportunities to generate alternate beliefs and reframe our thinking in more positive and helpful ways (65).

## Reflection



# Feeling Like A Fraud?

- **Impostor syndrome is persistent feelings of doubt and personal incompetence despite your education, experience, and accomplishments (67).**
- **Imposter syndrome presents itself in people who push themselves to work harder to compensate for perceived lack of intelligence and to "deserve" being where they are**
- **Imposter syndrome can be combatted through:**
  - **Acknowledge how you feel to loved ones.**
  - **Build a network with colleagues to support each other through these feelings.**
  - **Challenge your doubts by asking if there is any way to support that you are a fraud.**
  - **DO NOT COMPARE YOURSELF TO OTHERS (67). You are a rockstar and deserve to be here just as much as everybody else. Nobody can do everything.**

# STRESS AND ANXIETY

- Graduate students are 6 times more likely to experience episodes of stress and anxiety when compared to the general population (68).
- Signs of stress and anxiety include but certainly aren't limited to:
  - Headache.
  - Rapid heartbeat.
  - Difficulty concentrating.
  - Jitteriness.
  - Restlessness (69).
- Some ways to help manage anxiety include:
  - Sleeping better (6-8 hours a night).
  - Avoid stimulants such as caffeine.
  - Deep breathing exercises.
  - Engage in physical exercise (walking, jogging, etc.).
  - Do something you enjoy to help increase relaxation (69).

# Feeling Overwhelmed?

- Graduate school is stressful and can give us moments where we feel completely overwhelmed.
- When these moments arrive it can manifest some anxiety about the uncertainty ahead (70).
- It is important to be kind to yourself when these situations of feeling overwhelmed occur.
- When you are feeling overwhelmed by graduate school or by anything else in life you can:
  - Take a break, changing your environment can bring a new perspective to the situation.
  - Develop a list of "no's" it's okay to say "no" to something you don't want to do.
  - Reach out to your support system whether it's family, friends, or classmates ask for help from those you trust.
  - Write it down, documenting why you're feeling overwhelmed can help you channel those emotions in a healthy way and getting those thoughts out can help decrease levels of stress of feelings of being overwhelmed (70).

# Having trouble sleeping?

- **Poor sleeping habits can lead to problems with anxiety, memory, concentration, thinking, depression, and suicidal thoughts (71).**
- **A few things you can do to improve sleeping include:**
  - **Decrease naps in the day.**
  - **Don't drink caffeine a few hours before bedtime.**
  - **Go to bed at the same time every night.**
  - **Limit screen time up to 30-45 minutes before bedtime.**
  - **Spending an hour before bed doing relaxing activities.**
  - **Avoid eating heavy meals within a few hours before bedtime (71).**

# Want to fall asleep faster?

- Incorporating one or more of the following methods can help boost melatonin levels and fall asleep faster (72):
  - Scheduling technology-free time
  - Read a book
  - Listen to calming music
  - Dim the lights
  - Turn off electronic devices
  - Have a warm and calming drink (i.e. milk or chamomile tea)
  - Take a warm bath
  - Journaling your thoughts (72)

# Why meditate?

- Just a few minutes a day can really help improve your sense of calm and peace.
- Can improve overall concentration and mood (73).
- Is equally as effective at managing anxiety as any form of pharmaceutical intervention.
- Helps you improve coping skills for stressful situations (74).
- Improves positive emotions and thinking (73).
- Helps you focus on the present moment.
- Research suggests that meditation helps with improving chronic issues such as depression, high blood pressure, heart disease, and chronic pain (74).

# **Stress is inevitable, but burnout is not**

- **Burnout may be manifesting if:**
  - **You're feeling tired and drained all the time (76).**
  - **You have a sense of failure or self-doubt.**
  - **You are using food, drugs, or alcohol to cope (75).**
- **You can deal with burnout in the following ways:**
  - **Reaching out to others that you trust for positive interaction (76).**
  - **Find balance in your life by participating in something that brings you meaning (76).**
  - **Learn to say "no" to others so you can say "yes" to what you want to do.**
  - **Take a walk to boost your mood (75).**
  - **Avoid high-carb foods because they can cause crashes in mood and energy (76).**

# It's ok to not be ok

- Over 1/3 of graduate students have experienced some form of depression (77).
- Roughly 40% of graduate students may experience some form of clinical depression.
- Roughly 15% of graduate students report experiencing a major depressive episode (77).
- If you are experiencing depression, the following are some ways you can try the following techniques to help manage symptoms:
  - Seek help: It takes great strength & self-worth to admit you need help it is NOT weak (78).
  - Talk to your classmates: Your classmates are the only ones who truly understand the demands of your program
  - Celebrate small wins: sometimes things happen slowly and that's ok, enjoy the little things (78) .
  - Make time for the activities that give you meaning: Schedule a time and date to do something that you enjoy.

# Stop the stigma

- Stigma surrounding mental health often leads to exacerbation of mental health symptoms decrease likelihood of seeking help, reduces self-esteem, and makes social relationships difficult (79).
- Other harmful effects of mental health stigma include social isolation, lack of understanding from family, friends, and loved ones, and learned helplessness.
- To combat the stigma what you can do is:
  - Talk openly about mental health.
  - Educate yourself and others about the truth regarding mental health.
  - Show compassion for those with mental health issues.
  - Encourage equality.
  - Choose empowerment by owning your own life and not letting others dictate how you view yourself (79).

# You are not alone

- Graduate students are six times more likely to experience episodes of stress, anxiety and depression when compared to the general population (77).
- 35-45% of graduate students admit to stress-related issues that impact productivity levels.
- Roughly 30-40% of graduate students are at risk for clinical depression (77).
- 12-16% of graduate students have experienced severe depressive episodes.

If you have been experiencing issues with mental health or just need someone to talk to, please contact To schedule an appointment with student counseling. please email us at [scs@tun.touro.edu](mailto:scs@tun.touro.edu), call 702-777-9971, or visit our online portal at [studentwellness.tun.touro.edu](http://studentwellness.tun.touro.edu).

# **Need help? We got you!**

**Graduate school is hard and the journey is different for every student. That said, you are not alone.**

**Touro's student counseling provides a number of support for students such as:**

- **Student counseling**
- **Monday meditation**
- **Koru mindfulness classes**
- **Plus one program**
- **Aura App**
- **ECheckup To Go Programs**

**For any questions regarding these services please contact [scs@tun.touro.edu](mailto:scs@tun.touro.edu)**

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