

Addressing Anxiety in College Students

For many students college is a big change in their life. With big changes often comes big feelings. Although moving onto higher education can be exciting and something many look forward to in their future, it can also be stressful and scary. There are many ways to manage these new feelings, however the first step is addressing that they exist.

Before I get into addressing and managing anxiety for students, it is important to identify what anxiety really is. According to the American Psychological Association, anxiety is an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts, and physical changes. Anxiety is not to be confused with fear. Anxiety is a long-acting response, and typically involves worries about the future (American Psychological Association).

With that being said, it is not shocking to hear that many college students experience feelings of anxiety as they are starting their education. It is common to feel worried about what the future holds and to feel unsure whether or not you are making the right decisions.

Managing Anxiety

There are many ways to go about coping with anxiety. Unfortunately, anxiety often does not go away as quick as it comes on. Therefore, learning how to manage it in your daily life can be a helpful tool to use to get through the day.

One way to manage anxiety is by identifying what it is exactly that is causing the feeling. By doing this, you can find ways to work around

or work with the stressor. For example, if tests and exams are causing great feelings of anxiety then developing healthy study habits could help alleviate them. As a college student, here are some strategies that I have found to be most beneficial when studying:

- Active recall: this is a strategy that involves speaking out loud the information you are trying to remember without looking at your notes. I have found this to be especially useful when going through flashcards and trying to recall out loud what the other side says without looking at it.
- Starting early: the last thing one wants to be doing the night before a big exam is trying to cram all of the information into your brain. Sleep is extremely important, especially the night before a big stressful event. Therefore, I recommend starting to go over the material a week or so before. This way, you can do a little bit each day as opposed to all of it at once for the first time.
- Reaching out for help: asking for help is often easier said than done for most students, however it is almost always beneficial in the long run. Looking into tutoring services or forming study groups with classmates can be useful to get through tough material. Also, students should not be afraid to reach out to professors for additional help. Professors can seem scary, however more often than not they want to see their students succeed and are willing to help out!

Another tip for addressing anxiety is creating a general schedule for yourself, and having a school-life balance that works for you.

Although it is important to put quality effort into your studies, it is also important to take breaks and make time for yourself. One strategy I find to be helpful is dedicating the day time to studying

and homework, and reserving the night for unwind time. I especially find I am most productive during the breaks I have between classes. A general rule of thumb I like to follow is no work after dinner time (unless it is absolutely necessary). This way, one can stay in the academic mindset while they attend classes and remain motivated throughout their studying. By the time you are eating dinner, you are probably feeling tired from the day and it is best to stop before getting burnt out. This way you can focus on yourself for a bit and try to take your mind off things while you unwind from the day.

Creating a schedule for yourself can also be beneficial in terms of the actual work you are doing. Blocking out time throughout to dedicate to each class can help towards not getting too overwhelmed. If one class has a heavier workload than another, then more time should be dedicated towards that class. As a college student, I realize that trying to get assignments done way ahead of time is not realistic. However, I have found it to be helpful to always strive to have an assignment turned in at least 24 hours before the time it is due. It may not sound like that big of a difference, but everytime the real due date comes around it is reassuring to know that you already have it done.

Learning how to manage your anxiety that stems from school is only part of the battle. It is also important to develop healthy coping mechanisms so that when you are feeling anxious there are things you can rely on to try and take your mind off things. Good coping mechanisms should bring you back to the present, and help you focus on the now. Here are some general coping strategies that might work for you:

- Spending time with friends or loved ones

- Volunteering and working with local organizations
- Journaling your feelings
- Taking up a new or old hobby
- Listening to upbeat music or watching your favorite show

Remember that coping mechanisms should be worthwhile in a positive manner. Listening to sad music or doing an activity that might frustrate you may not be the best approach.

One of the major takeaways I hope those reading this can get is that it is okay to feel anxious or stressed because of school. What really matters is the way you manage those feelings. Many colleges and universities offer counseling services for this reason. You are not alone in how you feel, and it is okay to ask for help. Try to think of your anxiety as a stepping stone, rather than as an obstacle. Once you beat it, you can look back at that time and think of the things you were able to overcome. And if you did it once, you can certainly do it again.

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