

Wellness Education Centre

Managing stress and anxiety during the academic year through mental wellness

Part 2: Mental Awareness

Defining mental health (and by extension, mental wellness) is complex and in many ways challenging. Some may broadly refer to mental health as a state of emotional and psychological wellbeing: our thoughts, feelings, social connections, and ability to tackle and overcome stressful or unfavourable circumstances. It can be an objective, "something to be attained and retained [or a desire] to function reasonably productively... to enjoy the usual opportunities for pleasure in life" (Young 1). One central aspect of mental health and wellbeing is *self-awareness*, the ability to connect with your mind and reflect on its daily experiences. The following is dedicated to this topic of CONNECTION, and in particular the techniques which can be used to build a clear perception of personality, behaviours, strengths, weaknesses, and general emotions.

When we become conversational with our innermost self, a door is opened to growth and understanding.

"Without this, we are unaware of how we are, who we are, and what is happening to us... Stress and distress is often a key factor in "losing" ourselves, or losing touch with others and consensual reality. That is when things start to go wrong" (Young 1). How, then, can I practice self-awareness and incorporate techniques into my daily life?

Practice Meditation (10-30 minutes of daily self-reflection)

1

Sit in a comfortable position with your spine upright. Imagine that your head is touching the ceiling.

2

Breathe as naturally as possible. Observe your thoughts as they drift through the mind, then return your focus to breathing.

3

Afterwards, journal the thoughts that entered your mind. Acknowledge and consider both positive and negative mental notes.



Self-Awareness:

Strengthens our sense of direction, control, and inner peace.



Self-Awareness:

Builds self esteem and eases the difficulty of decision making.



Self-Awareness:

Contributes to the success of relationships and friendships.

SELF-AWARENESS TIPS

“Essentially, [self-awareness is] a commonplace inner experience; readily discernible, ever changing, and unique to you. We encourage you to do everything that you can to increase this level of self-awareness, as the process of doing this will mobilize your body-mind’s resources to their maximum potential” (Young 265).

For example:

- Choose a calming or encouraging phrase. Repeat these words and consider their significance and meaning to you.
- If you enjoy art, paint or sketch an image that captures the more memorable emotions you experience in a given day/week.
- When feeling stressed or unsettled, concentrate on the flow of your breaths from the lungs to the nose. Follow each breath from beginning to end. Inhale for: 1-2-3-4. Exhale for: 1-2-3-4.
- Create a monthly calendar and note your responsibilities and/or stresses. Include an action plan for each.

RESPONSIBILITY: On November 1st I am required to submit a 15 page paper.

STRESS: Essay writing is not my forte and I am intimidated by the number of pages.

ACTION PLAN: Beginning October 1st I will write half a page daily. I will access the Writing Support Centre twice to ensure I am on the right track.

- To achieve balance, incorporate perks and breaks into your monthly calendar.
- Be aware of physical signs that might indicate how you are feeling. Are your shoulders tense? Do your nails appear bitten and brittle? Are your teeth clenched? Could these physical characteristics be related to feelings of stress, apprehension, upset or nervousness?
- Monitor your self-talk. Recognizing negative emotions and self-perceived failures is important, however it is just as important to celebrate victories and successes- even small ones.
- After engaging in one or more of these self-reflective exercises, try to connect with a friend or family member. You may consider expressing your current thought processes or verbalizing your emotions, both positive and negative.

Works Cited

Young, Courtenay. *Help Yourself Towards Mental Health*. London: Karnac Books, 2010.