

How students can confront COVID-19 stress whilst studying from home: a student and staff perspective

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□ Male Voice □ Female Voice

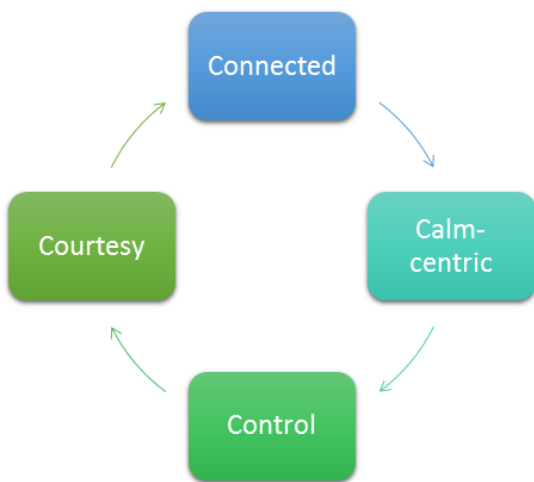
The COVID-19 (coronavirus) outbreak has the potential to increase student stress and anxiety whilst studying from home. Although we unanimously agree that the situation is tragic – it is crucial to remember that it is temporary.

Our 'national anxiety' needs to be considered as a form of shared stress where we are all in a state of unwanted uncertainty. However, anxiety thrives on uncertainty and this needs to be confronted during the COVID-19 lock-down.

When dealing with any crisis, it can be challenging to keep calm and remain anxiety-free. However, we find that students can confront COVID-19 stress by following our **Four-Factors of Managing COVID-19 Stress model**.

We hope that this student-led guide can help students regain their calm during the global 'pandemic panic'. Everyone is unique, so some of these ideas may not work for everyone. But we hope that within them, there is something for every student.

Fig 1: Four-factors of managing COVID-19 stress



Source: FSB

This model is easy to follow and implement. You are perhaps already covering most of the Four-Factors, but this plan keeps them in check and makes sure there is further focus on each of them. You will notice that each factor harmonises the other and gets stronger over time.

Connected

Facing any form of crisis may create a newly formed anxiety or it could exacerbate existing anxieties – so it is important to stay connected with – and seek support from – FSB staff, peers, family, friends and others that are in similar situations.

List your preferred communication support channels from FSB staff, fellow students, family and friends. List, in hierarchy form, who you have the most support from. Then map your preferred support via phone, social media apps, text, email, and video calling. What works best for you? This will give you added confidence and show you how much support you actually have. We have added some charities, that you may wish to

consider, at the base of this article to add too. You may wish to create separate versions titled with FSB staff, family and friends. By completing this factor, you will notice that you are not alone!

You may have listed social media as a preferred contact method. But be 'media mindful' by only interacting with messages that do not upset you. With such high levels of COVID-19 related panic and purposeful misinformation, social media distancing is perfectly fine and – can possibly be just as important as social distancing.

Fig 2: Organising how you stay connected

Support person	Preferred contact method	What you want	What you achieved

Source: FSB

According to Fink (2007), anxiety tells us that we 'should' be able to handle the entire situation alone and that we need no help in doing so. This is wrong – and one of anxiety's greatest deceptions. The fact is that we do need each other and by staying connected you can get help and support and, in turn, make solutions and opportunities easier to find.

Further, it is perfectly normal to feel vulnerable. In 2010, Brene Brown undertook her first TED talk on the Power of Vulnerability. It is worth a watch here: https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_the_power_of_vulnerability.

Her work shows that we all feel the same at most points in our lives.

TED talks are also great resources for advice. Ultimately, listening to such speakers reminds us that everyone faces their own challenges, and, at the same time, everyone needs

encouragement to remind them that things will get better.

Connect to yourself too! Focus on your state of wellbeing. For those that wish to, prayer and meditation can help also (see calm-centric below). Ultimately, history will ask you what you undertook during the COVID-19 crisis – make sure you have a positive and uplifting story to tell.

See our FSB SU guide below for more advice.

Calm-centric

In choosing your calm-centric position, you are not ignoring your issues or feelings, but you are preventing them from consuming you. Try to just take one step or day at a time, if you try to look at the bigger picture you may feel overwhelmed. This is not to say you should stick your head in the sand, we still all need to heed the Government, NHS and Public Health warnings, but try to set small achievable goals in your academic study and family life.

It is totally normal and understandable to feel anxious about what may happen during the COVID-19 outbreak, particularly when so many aspects of life, as we know it, are being changed.

Whilst we agree that there are many negatives with the current COVID-19 crisis, it is also true to say that not everything is negative. Instead of receiving just any news thrown at you, why not search for positive news! Have you web searched what is going right? There are heart-warming stories of how societies across the UK are supporting each other and how entire communities are coming together to support NHS staff. There are countless ways of volunteering – even during the national lock-down.

To remain calm-centric, you need to monitor what could be

making you more stressed. If social media messages or watching the news is making you stressed, you need to stop or reduce your interaction. So why not offset stressful moments with calming activities such as:

- Reading books
- Breathing exercises
- Indoor exercises
- Watching comedy shows
- Listening to your favourite music
- If the weather is good, open the windows
- If you have garden space, and the weather permits, sit outside and relax
- Practice mindfulness, meditation or prayer

Control

It is always easier said than done but it is worth trying to accept circumstances that cannot be changed by you – and instead focus on what you can change.

What does a good day mean to you now – in the current reality of COVID-19? Why not plan what you want to achieve? Here are some ideas:

Try to keep a routine. While studying from home why not wear your student ID badge? This keeps you in the present moment of academic work and prevents other distractions. It can also remind others that you still need to study.

When are your assignment deadlines? Work back from these dates (this is called a critical path). You will then be able plan how much you should have achieved by when. Take delight in knowing your studies are yours to own and no one can take this away from you.

Set achievable goals set within the new situations in your life.

Evaluate that there are many health benefits for you and your loved ones during the national COVID-19 lock down.

Courtesy

Being courteous to yourself means treating yourself in a kind and respectful way. You should always celebrate your successes and find things to be grateful about and take delight in completing your tasks (set in fig 2).

Create schedule and give yourself regular comfort breaks to become anxiety-free again. Set yourself a 'personal contract' where you reward yourself on completion of tasks.

Help others too. Share your Four-Factors of Managing COVID-19 Stress plan ideas with others. Learn from each other.

You need to now keep going and keep developing your plan overtime. You will really notice that the time you spend planning is never wasted.

Summary

Remember everyone at FSB is here for you; we are committed to you and your learning and we know that what you achieve will make life better for you and those who you love. Try to stay strong and positive and you will get through this with us all at your side.

Any crisis can derail us and resultantly increase anxiety. But by choosing your perspective, adopting a solution-focused approach and confidently reaching out for help and support, you can remain stress and anxiety free in any crisis.

Above all, remember that dealing positively and proactively with stress reactions caused by the COVID-19 outbreak can improve your health, quality of life, and wellbeing.

Why not add the below helpful messages to your Four-Factor plan? These have been compiled by FSB's SU.

FSB SU's stress-busting tips whilst studying at home

1. Be as nice and as kind as you can possibly be. Kindness is the best stress healer!
2. See an opportunity in every crisis. What good can come out of this bad situation – there are answers.
3. Do what is easy before doing what is difficult when it comes to assessment work.
4. The COVID-19 crisis seems endless, but it will end – so don't panic.
5. Read academic textbooks and journals suggested by FSB lecturers and not tabloids! Do not over-consume social media at a time like this as this adds stress. Also, scrolling through social media feeds is a bad habit. You could spend all day reading headlines, but this will not change your risk of getting coronavirus!
6. Plan ahead to feel more in control and always say: "I've done the best that I can to be prepared."
7. I have learned that when your mood is low, your energy is low so stay alert and active.
8. There is a lot of capacity for exercise in the home during the national lock-down. Push ups, star jumps and walking indoors all help. There are many exercise apps on Apple App Store and Android to facilitate.
9. Eat as healthily as possible. When you get bored people start to eat the wrong things and at the wrong times. Keep a food diary where you keep a record and share with other students.
10. To combat stress, an early night is a good night. And let's be honest, we have lots of opportunity for early nights now.

11. Listen to music regularly as it is a healer compared to any news, radio or TV! Or if you can – practice it. I play the guitar and I am getting better!
12. Stay in touch with fellow FSB students. Keep in touch with the classmates that you would usually be in touch with on a regular basis.
13. Do charity work or try and do something good for the NHS staff and other healthcare staff.
14. Think about helping foodbanks as many students I know work in hospitality. Maybe we can help foodbanks with our stocks?
15. Enjoy nature programmes on BBC or Netflix. Great to heal stress and anxiety.

Why not add to this list by leaving a comment below?

References

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- NHS.UK. (2017). *Mindfulness For Mental Wellbeing – Stress, Anxiety And Depression – NHS Choices*. [online] Available at: [Accessed 26 March 2020].

TED Talks

https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_the_power_of_vulnerability

[Accessed 26 March 2020].

https://www.ted.com/talks/susan_david_how_to_be_your_best_self_in_times_of_crisis [Accessed 26 March 2020].

NHS Stress Help

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/understanding-stress/> [Accessed 26 March 2020].

WHO Stress Help

https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/coping-with-stress.pdf?sfvrsn=9845bc3a_8 [Accessed 26 March 2020].

For further support on stress, anxiety contact:

- CALM, www.thecalmzone.net, 0800 585 858
- Heads Together, www.headstogether.org.uk
- Mind, www.mind.org.uk, 0300 123 3393
- Papyrus, www.papyrus-uk.org, 0800 068 41 41
- Samaritans, www.samaritans.org, 116 123

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Contact kunal.mehta@fairfield.ac to learn more about the Four-Factors of Managing COVID-19 Stress model.

The above article is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice or health advice, should you need medical or health advice please ensure you contact your GP or the NHS.