

College Readiness Toolkit



Child Mind
Institute

College is an exciting time in a young adult's life, but it presents many challenges. This is especially true for students with mental health or learning disorders, and even more true for students with both. That's why Oak Foundation and the Child Mind Institute have partnered to provide you with guidance on how to deal with some of these challenges during a critical period of building independence.

Whether you need help with procrastination, school-life balance, or general problem solving, we're here with suggestions for how to manage what school throws at you. If you find yourself struggling, we have tips to help you recover. And there's good news: recovering from adversity leads to personal growth! We suggest you read this toolkit before you head off to college, knowing you can come back to it whenever you find yourself in need. College may surprise you with difficulties you've never faced before, but with the right mindset, support systems in place, and tools at your disposal, we know you can be resilient and succeed!

We've broken this toolkit down into four phases, which you can think of through the metaphor of building a house: Things to Know Before You Go (clearing the ground), Body Regulation Basics (laying the foundation), The Grind (building the frame), and Achieving Your Vision (filling it in):

- The first step of building a house is clearing and leveling the ground. You can't build anything on uneven ground that's covered in rocks and trees. Similarly, the first step of succeeding in college involves a lot of preparation and set-up. **Things to Know Before You Go** will answer any questions you have about transitioning out of high school and into college life.
- The next step is laying the foundation. You can't build a structure without a solid base, and you won't be able to succeed in college without a solid foundation in terms of regulating your physical and mental health needs. **Body Regulation Basics** will provide information about how to keep yourself functioning at 100 percent so you can overcome challenges and pursue your goals. Small changes are still changes that help get started on that structure.
- The next step of building a house is building the frame, and this step of your journey involves learning how to balance your time, solve adult problems, and generally get things done. We call this section **The Grind** because following these steps will help you turn the everyday challenges of college into a routine, like running on a treadmill, one step at a time.
- The final step of building a house involves filling it in with internal structures like electrical wiring, plumbing, heating and cooling vents, and floorboards. Until you add all that content, it's just an empty shell, not a home. Similarly, if you have mastered all the skills in the first three sections, you'll be a functional college student, but you won't yet have become the *real you*. In **Achieving Your Vision**, we'll help you with the crucial step of figuring out what kind of person you want to be, and with making choices to help you become that person.

Note for parents: We have some materials especially for you, but we also encourage you to read the materials aimed at students. Doing so will make it easier for you to support your kids in applying the skills and strategies aimed at them, and to give you a heads up about things that might be on their minds each semester.

Below, you will find a list of our guides, tip sheets, and other resources organized into those four sections. Broadly speaking, the materials in the first section will be especially helpful to read before you leave for college. The materials in the second and third sections will be especially helpful during your first year and serve as a useful reference in the years to come. And the materials in the final section will be especially helpful as you get ready to graduate from college and transition into adulthood.

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Things to Know Before You Go (clearing the ground)



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Things You Need to Know Before You Leave for College

What you'll learn

- What steps you need to take before you leave for college
- What to buy before you leave for college
- What skills you need to learn before you leave for college

Steps to take

Get plugged in

- Join and follow school-specific groups and pages on WhatsApp, GroupMe, Facebook, etc.
- Sometimes there are groups especially for your entering class. Try searching for “college name” and “class of 20XX.”

Dorm and roommate

- Make room selections, if that's an option. Be forewarned that most dorm rooms are small, especially for freshmen. You may not have much private space.
- Connect with your future roommate, if you have one. This could be in person, via phone or text, or through social media.
- Discuss who is bringing what shared items like a TV, mini fridge, speakers, or gaming consoles.
- If you have any food allergies or medical concerns, let them know in advance!
- You can ask if they have any allergies as well.
- If you and your roommate don't get along, look here for tips.

Think about what to bring

- Don't overpack — focus on essentials.
- You will likely have minimal space for your things.

- The less you bring, the more opportunity you have to redefine yourself as an adult and buy what suits the “adult” version of you.
- The more you have, the messier your room can get, and the harder it will be to focus and study.
- If you do forget something, you can buy it, your folks can mail it, or you can grab it next time you head home for a weekend or holiday.
- You may want to bring some simple decorations or reminders of home, like photos or a favorite poster.

Make a packing checklist

- Before you start, make yourself a packing checklist so you don't forget any essentials.
- Earbuds or ear plugs and sleep masks are a smart choice if you have a roommate or are just a light sleeper.
- Don't forget chargers for your electronics!

Choose your class schedule

- Some schools have limited options or required classes for freshmen. Your school's website can tell you more.
- There are usually so many options, it can be overwhelming to choose. But remember that you don't need to cram everything into your first semester!

- Don't overdo it. Especially when you're first adjusting, it's not a great idea to overload on credits or take all 300-level classes.
- If applicable, contact the accessibility/disability/accommodations office.

Get in touch with the financial aid office

- Ask about reserved student jobs or a work-study program.
- Find out if you are eligible for additional scholarships, grants, or fellowships.

Look up where stuff is

- Your dorm
- Buildings where your classes will be
- The student health center
- The school bookstore
- The closest pharmacy
- Banks near/or on campus

Gather important documents

- Write a resume if you don't have one already and plan to apply for jobs.
- Get a government ID, such as a learner's permit, driver's license, non-driver ID, or passport.
- Get a copy of your health insurance card or sign up for student insurance if needed.

Get involved, but not too much

- Find a list of student clubs and organizations, and see which interest you.
- There may also be a club fair during orientation.
- Some students focus on studying and avoid socializing or joining extracurriculars.
- Some students socialize and overload on activities, leaving little time for schoolwork.
- Joining an extracurricular group or two can help you meet other students and feel connected to the school. But you still need to find time to study.

Things to buy

Textbooks

- Once you register for classes, your school should have an automated system that tells you all the books you need.
- You can buy or rent directly from your school bookstore, but it may be cheaper to buy secondhand from eBay, Amazon, or other third parties.
- If using a third-party store, find out if the specific textbook edition matters — and be sure to get the correct one.

Furniture and appliances

- Try to find a picture of a standard room in your dorm or apartment building.
- If you live on campus, you can assume you will have a bed, mattress, closet, desk, desk chair, and chest of drawers.
- Make sure you have the right size sheets. Many dorms feature twin XL beds.
- You will probably not have a microwave, mini fridge, TV, floor lamps, rugs, pillows, or much shelf space. Keep in mind that there will likely be a common room and kitchenette with communal TV, microwave, and fridge.
- A hot pot or electric kettle come in handy for tea and ramen.

Clothes

- Obviously you need clothes, but pay special attention if you're heading to a different climate than you're used to.
- If you're going from California to Maine, for example, you're probably going to need to invest in some winter gear.

Bathroom supplies

- What is in your bathroom at home?
- Stock up on essentials like a toothbrush, toothpaste, shampoo, conditioner, body wash, soap, lotion, shaving cream, razor, and extra razor blades.
- You probably want a shower kit with a portable, waterproof caddy full of everything you'll need for hygiene.

- Flip-flops or shower sandals are highly recommended for trips to the communal bathrooms and showers.
- Put together a basic first aid kit with pain relievers, bandages, and some cold remedies.

Room decorations

- Your school bookstore will probably sell some.
- There may also be vendors on or near campus the first week looking to sell you more!

Healthy snacks

- It's hard to learn and study if you're not feeding your brain properly.
- Eat fruits, whole grains, proteins, and "good" fats.
- Buy snacks that will keep you full and you won't get sick of.
- Stay hydrated. With water.
A reusable water bottle helps.

Skills to learn: Self-care

How to cook basics

- This is especially important if you live off campus or in an apartment.
- YouTube can teach you lots of recipes!
- Look for staples that you never get sick of, like eggs, grilled cheese, or pasta.

How to manage your dining plan

- Meal plan options vary by college.
- Most offer a plan with a set number of meals — usually three a day — at the dining hall, where you will have unlimited buffet-style food.
- Some schools offer tiered plans that let you choose based on how often you'll eat on campus.
- These kinds of meal plans are typically billed by the semester and can't be changed until the end of the drop/add period.
- Some schools also offer dining dollars or points, which can be used at on-campus restaurants and in the student union food court.
- Usually these can be reloaded online.

How to do laundry

- If you don't already know how, ask your parents to teach you and practice a few times before leaving home.
- It can be helpful to know how to use various types of detergents, including liquid, pods, and sheets.
- Be sure you know how to empty the dryer lint — letting it collect is a real fire hazard.
- When in doubt, check YouTube.
- Before laundry time, make sure you have detergent.
- Find out how to obtain a laundry card and load it with money.
- If possible, do laundry on weekdays — EVERYONE tries to do it on weekends.
- Study while you wash and dry.

How to take medications on a schedule

- Locate a pharmacy and make sure you'll be able to pick up your prescriptions there.
- If you need to take a medication at a certain time, set reminder alarms on your phone.
- Open your clock app, create a new alarm, pick the correct time of day, and set it to repeat daily. Label the alarm. Set as many alarms as you need!
- If you take multiple pills, get a pill case labeled with days of the week. This makes it easy to check at a glance whether you've taken them that day.
- Keep the pills in easy-to-access locations. For example, put pills you take first thing in the morning with your toothbrush, and keep afternoon pills in your backpack.

What to do if you get sick

- Go to the student health center, which is probably free.
- Email your professors to let them know if you will miss class, and request copies of materials you may miss.
- If you are really sick, try to reschedule or get an extension if you are going to miss an important deadline or test. Your professor may ask for a doctor's note.
- Professors prefer to get these emails in advance, rather than after the fact.

How to make specialist doctor's appointments for yourself

- If your college is far from home, you may need to find a provider who is closer to school.
- Ask for recommendations or search the provider directory on your insurance's website to find doctors who will be covered.
- For routine appointments, you can wait to schedule them with your usual doctor when you know you'll be back home.
- To make an appointment for something that cannot wait, like perhaps physical therapy or psychiatry, find the office phone number and give them a call during business hours. Their office staff will be able to assist you.
- Be sure to ask if they take your insurance.
- Double check your school schedule before confirming any appointment time. Will you have enough time to get to your classes?
- Put it in your calendar app, write a sticky note and put it on your desk, and do whatever else you need to do to make sure you'll remember the appointment!
- If something comes up and you need to miss the appointment, call the office as far in advance as possible. Some offices charge a missed appointment fee.

Exercise

- Exercise is good for your mind and body, so make a plan before you even get to college.
- Remember that even a little bit is better than none. If you're short on time, you can still probably squeeze in some sit-ups during a study break.
- Most universities have free or low-cost fitness centers on campus
- Many universities offer free fitness classes — some will have you sign up through the fitness center, others through your class registration portal.
- You can also check the local area for yoga classes, martial arts, etc.
- There are also tons of free videos online if you prefer to work out in your room.
- Once you start at school, you can find an exercise buddy to go on walks or runs, spot you in the weight room, swim laps, or do a Pilates video together.
- Most universities offer a selection of intramural sports, where students from the same school practice together and compete against each other for fun.
- Even if you don't play a sport or go to the gym, taking walks can also be great for self-care. Your smart phone probably estimates how many steps you take per day.

How Do I Manage My Money in College?

What you'll learn

- Steps to take before you start school
- How bank accounts and credit cards work
- How to make, and stick to, a budget

Make a plan with your parents

- Sit down with your parents and make a clear plan for your finances.
- If they will be helping you out, what are the terms?
- Will you have a debit or credit card? Is money they send you only for approved expenses? Is it a set amount per month or term? Do you need to keep up a certain GPA?

Getting a job

- You might need to snag a job to earn your own money.
- Look into on-campus jobs to cut down on commute time, especially if you qualify for federal work study.
- Try to pick a job that can be flexible around your studying needs.
- Only spend what you need from your paycheck, and save the rest to put towards loans or a rainy day fund.

Banking

- If you don't already have a bank account, try to set one up at a bank with locations on campus and in town.
- There are many kinds of bank accounts, but a checking account is typical for daily use.
- You can deposit and withdraw money as needed. Just keep in mind that if you take out more money than you have, you will be charged a fee.

- Your account will likely come with a physical debit card. You may be able to add this to your smartphone's "wallet" as well. Do not lose it!
- You can usually use a debit card at ATMs to get cash and like a credit card to pay for things.
- You will need to create a username and password to manage the account online, and a PIN number to take out money from ATMs. Don't share these with anyone, for any reason (except maybe your parents).
- If the bank has an app, download it to your smartphone so you can easily check your balance.
- You can withdraw money from your bank's ATMs for free.
- When you take out cash from a different bank or an ATM at a store, you will be charged a fee — sometimes two.
- Your account will have its own account and routing numbers, which you can use to pay bills or receive paychecks. You can find that on your bank's website.

Credit cards

- Be careful with credit cards.
- They often come with very appealing introductory offers to reel you in, like a big discount at your favorite store.
- While debit cards let you spend the money you actually have, credit cards let you spend as much as your credit limit — which is typically in the thousands. The catch? You need to pay it back. Fast.

- Using a credit card is like taking out a loan you're supposed to pay back right away.
- If you can't pay off the full amount by the due date, you'll be charged interest — usually over 20%. So if you leave a balance of \$100, the next month you'll owe \$120 or more.
- Credit card interest is generally more than double a typical car loan, three times as high as a house mortgage, and quadruple a federal student loan.
- If you tend to make impulse buys and don't pay off your balance each month, this could negatively impact your credit score later in life.
- HOWEVER, if you know you have the skills to only charge what you're able to pay back, a credit card could also be an opportunity for you to build up your credit score.
- Each month you pay off your whole balance, your credit score will go up!
- Add up your expenses. Is it more than your income? Time to make some cuts. While you may need books for school, you could probably get less takeout.
- Don't forget to take advantage of student discounts with your school ID or email address.
- Do you have money to spare? That's great. It's always good to have an emergency fund because we all know how often unexpected expenses come up.
- It will probably take a few months of budgeting and tracking your spending habits to really get in a groove with budgeting. But it's a skill that will help you for life.

Budgeting basics

- The best way to responsibly manage your money is to make a budget — and stick to it.
- You can write it out by hand, make a spreadsheet, or use a dedicated budgeting app or program.
- Add up your monthly income from your parents or job.
- Make a list of all your set expenses each month, like tuition payments, phone bill, or music streaming service.
- Next, think about variable but regular costs, like books, eating out, or groceries. Estimate about how much you spend on each.
- Think ahead. Are you saving for something? If you want to save up \$400 for spending money on Spring break in four months, budget now to set aside \$100 each month.

Why Do Many College Students Experience Mental Health Problems?

What you'll learn

- Why many college students — especially those with learning differences — experience mental health problems
- What mental health supports are available
- The risks for students who don't seek support

It's common to struggle

Why do so many college students struggle emotionally and academically, especially in their first semester away from home?

- They have all that glorious freedom, but not the support system they had in high school.
- Having total control over their time takes getting used to, and it can be hard to make effective decisions about what to do, and when.
- If students fall behind in their coursework, the resulting stress makes it even harder to focus.
- That's why we're here — to give you the tools to juggle all these new opportunities and responsibilities, so you can have fun and find ways to feel successful.
- We'll help you build a new support system for yourself.

Learning and mental health challenges at college

If you are going to college with learning disabilities (LDs), existing mental health problems — or both — it's especially important to take care of yourself and set yourself up to succeed.

- You can do that by taking advantage of the supports your college offers.
- Also use the strategies we offer in this toolkit for being organized, staying focused on what you care

about, and recovering when you (inevitably) find yourself in a jam.

- Trust us — no matter what you are going through you are not the only one.
- It's a learning process. We don't just mean learning computer science or political theory, but learning how to be the person you want to be, and how to surround yourself with friends who will support you in that.
- As with any learning process, there will be bumps, hiccups, and mistakes. And that's okay!

Why seek support

If you have a learning difference, it's especially important that you get the support you need — and deserve, and are entitled to. Why?

- Many students with LDs do not seek services, in part due to the shame and stigma associated with needing "extra help."
- But most college curriculums were not designed with learning disabilities in mind.
- Once you graduate, no one will ever ask whether you received extra time on exams.
- No one will ask whether you typed assignments that other people had to handwrite. No one will even care!
- Students with learning disorders who don't get the necessary supports are at a higher risk of dropping out or developing mental health problems than students without LDs.

Finding support

There is help available for all these challenges! The folks at your college want you to succeed and there are typically many services available.

- Your college or university likely has a counseling center or student mental health services center. It may be part of the larger student health services center.
- Try searching your school's website for terms like "counseling center" or "mental health," or simply contact the student "health services" center!
- Your school probably also has a disability, accessibility, or learning services center, which can assist with your learning needs.
- Try searching your school's website for terms like "disability," "accessibility," or "accommodations." It may also help to ask your academic advisor!

If you are in a mental health crisis, please do not wait for an appointment. Please call 911 or 988 (the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline), or visit 988lifeline.org

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What **Mental Health Supports** Are Available on Campus?

What you'll learn

- How to connect with the mental health supports available at your school
- What kinds of services may be available for your mental health needs
- What services may be available if your mental health problems are impacting your school performance

Counseling and health services

Your college/university likely has a counseling center or student mental health services center. It may be part of the larger student health services center.

- Try searching your school's website for terms like "counseling center" or "mental health," or simply contact the student health services center.
- They may offer a variety of different services, most of which should be free!
- Services may be virtual or in-person, depending on the school.

Confidentiality

Mental health professionals are legally obligated to maintain your confidentiality, with a few exceptions (child abuse, elder abuse, risk of suicide, etc.).

- The bottom line is, it is illegal for a licensed therapist to disclose your private information, except when they're legally obligated to protect you or someone else from harm.
- If a therapist does break confidentiality, they can risk losing their license, and therefore their job.
- Prior to your first appointment, they will give you a form to sign that explains this in more detail.

Types of services available

Each school is different, so it's important to find out exactly what types of services are available so you can find ones that match your needs.

Individual therapy

- Meeting with an individual therapist, usually 1x/week.

Group therapy

- Meeting with a small number of therapists (typically 1–3) and a small number of other students (likely 3–10, though this can vary widely, so feel free to ask).
- Groups can be more "process" focused (talking about problems and supporting each other), more skills focused (learning specific techniques to manage symptoms), or a combination of both.
- Group members are expected to maintain confidentiality as well, though this is harder to guarantee.

Wellness workshops

- Many schools now offer in-person and virtual workshops on a variety of topics like insomnia, mindfulness, and addiction.

Medication management

- Most centers will have a psychiatrist, physician's assistant, or nurse practitioner who prescribes medication for ADHD, anxiety, depression, and other conditions.

- Be sure to tell your provider what other medications you take!
- These appointments will likely be free, but the medication itself will not be. The school doesn't pay for it — you do.
- If you are under 25, you may still be covered under your parent or guardian's medical insurance.
- Your school may offer medical insurance as well. Search "health insurance" on your school website to learn more.
- If neither your family nor your school have insurance for you, you may be able to obtain affordable health insurance through your home state. Google "<state name> health insurance marketplace" to learn more.
- Insurance will make prescriptions for common psychiatric medications MUCH cheaper, sometimes as little as \$5/month. You may need to reach a deductible by paying full price for a certain number of pills first, though.

Support groups

- Like group therapy, but without an actual therapist present. The group members share stories, struggles, and successes, and support each other through challenges.
- These generally focus on a theme that is relevant to all the members, such as grief, trauma, LGBTQ+ issues, or addiction.

Academic accommodations

If your mental health challenges are impacting your ability to complete your school obligations, the accessibility/disability services office may be able to help!

- Try searching your school's website for terms like "disability," "accessibility," or "accommodations." It may also help to ask your therapist or academic advisor!
- Some students with ADHD, a learning disorder, other neurodevelopmental disorders, or certain anxiety and mood disorders may be eligible for accommodations, including extra testing time or other special testing circumstances.

If you are in a mental health crisis, please do not wait for an appointment. Please call 911 or 988 (the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline), or visit 988lifeline.org

What **Academic Supports** Are Available on Campus?

What you'll learn

- What official and unofficial resources are available on campus, and how to find them
- What support services may be available if your learning disorder is impacting your school performance

While some subjects may click easily, there are bound to be times when you need a little extra support. This is totally normal, and you don't need to do it alone! Here are a few examples of the types of resources you can seek out.

Peer tutoring

Most colleges and universities offer FREE peer tutoring, especially in the core subjects that everyone must take (math, science, writing, etc.).

- Try searching your school's website for terms like "peer tutoring," "tutoring center," "academic resource center," "educational resource center," or "learning resource center" to find it.
- Eventually (though probably not as a first-semester freshman), you can volunteer as a peer tutor, too!

Office hours

Professors are typically required to set aside designated time for students to visit them and seek support, either about specific assignments or the course in general.

- The professor's office hours will usually be listed on the course syllabus.
- Sometimes office hours are drop-in, but often meetings can be arranged via email, or just by speaking to the professor before or after class.

- Put their office hours on your calendar. You can plan to tackle your homework for each professor's class around the times when they are available, perhaps even in a location close to their office. That way, if you need help with a specific assignment you can ask the professor directly.

Teaching assistants

Most professors will also have a teaching assistant (TA) or graduate assistant (GA) supporting each of their classes.

- This is a higher-level student or graduate student who excels in the subject area of the class.
- These TAs will usually have their own office hours as well, and may be more readily available than the professor.

Classmates

Your classmates can also be a great resource!

- It's very common for students ask each other to form study groups, share notes, or work on assignments together. You don't have to do it alone!
- Ask your classmates for their contact info. School email address, phone number, social media — it doesn't matter, as long as you have a way to reach them.
- Leaning on a peer can also be less stressful and more convenient than talking to a professor, and they may even be able to explain the material in a more relatable way.

LD resources

If you have a diagnosed learning disorder or other neurodevelopmental difference, additional supports and formal accommodations may also be available to you.

- Your school likely has a disability or accessibility services center that can assist you with your learning needs.
- Try searching your school's website for terms like "disability," "accessibility," or "accommodations." It may also help to ask your academic advisor!
- If you have undergone the neuropsychological evaluation process recently, the report from that evaluation will typically spell out recommended accommodations that will help you handle the material and reach your potential in college.
- Even students in graduate school often continue to utilize accommodations for support.

How Important Is a **Syllabus**, Anyway?

What you'll learn

- Common ways syllabi are formatted
- Key details to look for when checking your syllabus
- Strategies to connect the information on your syllabi to your phone and/or planner

What is a syllabus?

- A syllabus is your guide to a course and what will be expected of you in that course.
- Generally, it will include course policies, rules and regulations, required texts, and a schedule of assignments.
- It also tells you how much quizzes, tests, papers, and participation are factored into your final grade.
- A syllabus should be able to tell you nearly everything you need to know about how a course will be run and what will be expected of you.

Types of syllabi: paper vs. electronic

Some professors give you physical pieces of paper during the first class.

- Copy those.
- Laminate them.
- Never lose them.

Other teachers will e-mail them to you or post them online.

- Bookmark them.
- You can print your syllabi and keep them together in a binder.

What to look for on a syllabus

A syllabus is usually a short document that's packed with lots of info. Here are the dates and expectations to take special note of:

- Final examination
- Final Paper
- Midterm Examination
- Midterm Paper
- Quizzes
- Brief Papers
- Weekly reading records
- Discussion questions or weekly online posts
- Allowed # of excused absences
- Add/drop dates for classes
- Teacher and TA office hours

How to make the most of your syllabus

Everyone operates differently and it may take some trial and error to find the system that works for you. But there are some basic steps that can help anyone get started.

Calendars and planners

You'll need a readily accessible calendar or planner at all times.

- Use your smartphone as a calendar.
- Post a calendar on your wall or desk.
- Keep a calendar in your planner.
- Do all of the above.
- Daily planners give you more writing room overall, but calendars are helpful for seeing everything at once.

Getting started

When you're just starting out in college, it can be overwhelming to know how to prioritize. Here's a step-by-step plan to help you get organized and put those syllabi to good use.

- Collect all syllabi.
- Get your calendar/planner.
- Add all important dates and assignments to your calendar or planner.
- Review your course load from month to month, then from week to week.
- Some assignments will be announced or changed in class, and will not be on the syllabus. Be sure to take note of these.

Plan start dates for studying and paper completion with the following guidelines:

- Review 3 or 4 days ahead of tests.
- Start writing short papers one week ahead of due date.
- For longer term papers, you will likely need to start planning steps a month in advance.
- Schedule in any heavy reading loads or due dates for reading assignments.
- Set regular reminders in your phone.

Monitor your calendar and update as necessary including:

- Study sessions
- Make-up classes
- Parent visits and holidays
- Office hours
- TA Sessions
- Changes in test or due dates

Cross off calendar days and assignments when they're done!

How Do Depression and Anxiety Directly Impact Learning?

What you'll learn

- How depression impacts learning
- How different anxiety disorders impact learning
- What to do if your mental health is negatively impacting your grades

Depression

Prolonged sadness may be the most recognizable symptom of depression, but it's not the only one. And they can all seriously impact a college student's ability to learn.

- Trouble sleeping can lead to oversleeping, which can lead to missed classes, which can lead to falling behind on required knowledge and assignments.
- Low energy can decrease retention of learned material and cause students to have difficulty starting assignments — which can lead to falling behind.
- Difficulty concentrating can make it hard to learn in class, leading to knowledge gaps that can compound as the semester progresses. It can also make it harder to perform well on tests and assignments.
- Low motivation can make it hard to attend class, hard to start and complete assignments, and hard to ask for help. Low motivation can lead to feelings of helplessness and hopelessness as well.
- All of these symptoms can result in a downward spiraling, self-fulfilling prophecy in which a student falls behind and loses self-esteem, making their depression worse.
- This makes all of the above symptoms worse, and the cycle repeats itself.

Anxiety

Though we tend to talk about anxiety in a broad sense, there are different types of anxiety disorders — and they all impact students in different ways.

- Students with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) may find that they spend so much time worrying that they don't have enough time or mental energy to complete their work.
- Like students with depression, they may also experience trouble sleeping and difficulty concentrating.
- Students with social phobia may have a hard time asking questions in a classroom setting, giving class presentations, asking a teacher or peer for help, or speaking their mind during group projects.
- Students with obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) may have difficulty meeting their academic obligations if their symptoms get in their way.
- Perfectionism — which is common with OCD — can result in not completing or submitting work despite being intellectually capable. Or, it may lead students to spend too much time on irrelevant details and miss the big picture. Students with GAD may also have these challenges.
- Anxiety can come in many other forms as well, and can cause problems even if you don't have a formal diagnosis.

What should I do if my mental health is getting in the way of my academic performance?

Everyone struggles sometimes, and college can introduce new stressors. Whether you have a mental health diagnosis or are experiencing these symptoms for the first time, you are not alone. So what can you do?

Reach out!

- If you're having trouble solving a problem on your own, asking for help is the most responsible thing you can do.
- People often experience shame when admitting they need help, which is totally human and understandable. HOWEVER...
- In the vast majority of cases, we judge ourselves much more harshly than anyone else ever does, and...
- Even adults need support for school, work, and other aspects of life.
- Reach out to your counseling center or student mental health services center, which may be part of the larger student health services center. They can help.
- If you have a therapist from back home, whether you are still seeing them regularly or not, it may be good to schedule an appointment to talk to them about your mental health in college.
- Reach out to your school's accessibility/disability services office. Mental health challenges can be considered disabilities in some circumstances, and you may be eligible for accommodations.
- If academics are stressing you out, seek out your school's free tutoring services. Try searching your school's website for terms like "peer tutoring," "tutoring center," "academic resource center," "educational resource center," or "learning resource center."
- If you're shy about doing so, your academic advisor, staff in the accessibility office, or providers at the counseling center may be able to help.
- If all of the above seem too hard, ask a family member, peer, favorite professor, advisor, or other trusted adult for help.
- If you are struggling to keep up in class, your professors will likely be sympathetic if you're upfront about what's going on. They may have their own mental health challenges, and they have likely had many students with challenges like yours over the years. They may be willing to work with you on things like extensions or extra credit.

If you are in a mental health crisis, please do not wait for an appointment. Please call 911 or 988 (the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline), or visit 988lifeline.org

Body Regulation Basics (laying the foundation)



Child Mind
Institute

How Do You Balance School, Work, and Your Social Life?

One of the biggest adjustments you may face as a first-year college student is learning how to balance your schoolwork with everything else. But with the proper tools, you can become a work-life balance ninja. Here are two powerful strategies to set goals and priorities so that you can effectively budget your time.

Tools of discipline

Originally published in a book called *The Road Less Traveled* by M. Scott Peck in 1978, the tools of discipline have withstood the test of time. The four steps offer a clear path to face problems and overcome challenges.

Acceptance of responsibility

- What are your responsibilities? What are “musts,” not “wants”?
- Do you need to maintain a certain GPA to keep your financial aid? To get into graduate school or secure a good internship?
- Do you have a job? Do you require childcare?

Dedication to reality

- How much can you realistically handle?
- Can you stay up until 3am and still function in class the next day? Can you drink alcohol on weeknights and still function the next day? How much do you learn if you go to class high?

What you'll learn

- How to use the skills of discipline to guide your priorities
- How to use the PLEASE skills to manage your physical needs
- What a sample school/work/life balance schedule looks like

Delay of gratification

- If you always do what you want before you do what you need, will you have enough time — and motivation — to do what you need?
- Will the stress of unfinished tasks weigh you down and decrease your enjoyment of other activities?

Balancing (the above)

- Do you ever give yourself a break, take the foot off the gas pedal, and just relax? Nobody can go full-speed 100% of the time, and that's okay.

DBT'S PLEASE Skills

Dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) centers around learning to understand and accept difficult feelings. You don't need to be in DBT to benefit from some of its strategies. PLEASE is an acronym designed to help you remember steps for emotional regulation so that you can make the healthiest decisions for yourself.

PL: Treat physical illness

- Society sometimes elevates the idea that pushing through illness is more admirable than self-care.
- Sometimes, you have no choice but to push through. But generally, you will be more effective if you take the steps and time to recover from illness.

E: Balance your eating

- Your body is made from the food you eat, and your energy levels and mental state are hugely impacted by the foods you eat.
- Eat a balanced diet (proteins, carbohydrates, fats, and various vitamins and minerals), and don't eat too much or too little.

A: Avoid mood-altering drugs

- Many people will experiment with drugs at college. Be honest with yourself about the consequences they have on your mind and body.
- Generally, when you take a psychoactive drug, your brain stops producing similar chemicals in an attempt to restore "homeostasis." This contributes to hangovers or withdrawal symptoms.
- Many substances (including alcohol) dehydrate you as well. Drink water!

S: Sleep

- Some of your peers may brag about how little sleep they are getting; they are likely facing consequences, whether they admit it or not!
- The average person needs 7–9 hours of sleep per night.
- Sleeping consistently is important! If you sleep 9 hours Thursday, 5 hours Friday, 5 hours Saturday, and 11 hours Sunday, that averages out to 7.5 hours per night. But you will NOT feel as rested as if you had slept 7.5 hours per night.

E: Exercise

- The human body was built to move.
- Most colleges and universities have a gym or fitness center.
- Many will offer a variety of fitness classes, and most will also offer various intramural sports!
- There is no one "best" way to exercise. Do what works for your mind and body.

Budgeting your time

How much time should you devote to each aspect of a healthy, well-balanced life? There are 168 hours in a week. So for a hypothetical student with a full course load, a part-time job, and no other responsibilities...

- 60 hours for sleep
- 15 hours for class
- 25–30 hours for studying and homework
- 10 hours for meals
- 20 hours for P/T job
- That would leave about **35–40** hours for free time, like going to parties, extracurriculars, and so on.
- If you have a learning disability, you may need more time for studying. Be realistic with yourself.

What else can you do for fun?

College has no shortage of creative, fun, healthy ways for you to spend your time. Here are just a few ideas.

Check out your school's "student activities" office

- Your school probably hosts free or cheap student events. Things like trivia night, dances, comedy shows, concerts, etc.
- You can also find a calendar for things like sporting events, a cappella concerts, band performances, student plays/musicals, etc.

Join a club

- Your school likely has a club day or activities fair early in the year.
- Some clubs are more academic, some are more for fun. Either way, they're a great way to meet people with similar interests!

Play intramural or club sports

- These teams focus on fun over competition.
- They're another great way to meet people while also staying physically active.

How Does **Sleep** Impact Learning and Mental Health?

What you'll learn

- How sleep impacts your ability to learn, and your overall mental state
- Signs you may not be getting enough sleep
- Dos and don'ts of healthy sleep habits

The importance of sleep

Sure, we all know sleep is essential. But many of us — especially in college — still don't get the rest we need in order to operate at our best.

- Staying up late every once in a while is not a huge problem.
- But making a habit of it can mess with your overall health.
- REM (rapid eye movement) sleep — the deepest stage of the sleep cycle — stimulates the brain regions used in learning. The more REM sleep you get, the more your brain is equipped to learn.
- Studies show that REM sleep affects the learning of certain skills and has a notable impact on recall.
- Lack of sleep also makes you feel lethargic, which impacts motivation, effort, and attention.
- Essentially, when deep sleep is disrupted, it wreaks havoc on your brain and impairs your ability to think clearly and remember things.

Sleep and mental health

Not only is sleep important, but it is also linked with your mental health.

- Once upon a time, sleep problems were thought of as symptoms of mental health conditions — but they may contribute to or even be a cause of them.
- This also means that getting a healthy amount of sleep may help alleviate the symptoms associated with a mental health condition, and vice versa.

- If you consistently feel drowsy during the day or doze off, then you may have severe sleep deprivation or even a sleep disorder.
- Other signs of a sleep deficit include: habitually using caffeine to get through the day, not waking up refreshed, drowsiness while driving or during mundane activities like watching TV, memory problems, or difficulty falling or staying asleep.

Dos and don'ts

Getting the rest your body and brain needs isn't complicated. Here are the ABCs of good sleep.

- Do use your bed only for sleep — not for work or using electronics — so that your brain doesn't associate your bed as a place of busy activity.
- Do get 7–8 hours of sleep per night.
- Do get a full night's sleep before a big test.
- Do keep to a consistent sleep schedule.
- Don't use substances, especially while working or studying.
- Don't party, play video games, or use substances the night before an exam.
- Don't wait and pull all-nighters for studying or papers.
- Don't skip classes to sleep in.

How Can You Make Sure You're **Studying Enough?**

What you'll learn

- A rule of thumb for how many hours to study per week
- The importance of work-life balance
- The consequences of studying TOO much

The basics

Everyone is different, and some subjects may click for you faster than others. But there is a general rule of thumb that can give you a sense of what to expect.

- College students should spend about two hours studying, reading, and writing per week for each credit hour they take.
- Full-time students should anticipate spending about 30 HOURS PER WEEK on their work outside of class.

This can seem overwhelming, but think of it this way:

- In high school, the average student has about 3 hours of homework every day.
- In college, you should be spending almost twice that amount of time each day on work.
- But the number of hours you spend in class each week is much fewer in college... usually half of the time you're in class in high school.
- Also, the work in college is SUPPOSED to be harder.
- If the course material seems more dense, abstract, or challenging, don't be hard on yourself... it's supposed to.
- Basically, between class time and work time, that's about 40–45 hours per week.
- Yes, this is essentially a standard workweek for an adult.

- Think of college as a job that is preparing you for your real job.
- There may be some weeks when you have much less work, and some weeks when you have more. Enjoy the extra time when you have it, and see if you can get a head start on upcoming projects!

But what about time for friends?

This is an important question! College is a time when many people form some of the best friendships they will ever have. Of course you'll want to spend time with those people!

Find the balance

- Like anything else in life, this is a question of balance. While building relationships may be ONE of your goals for college, it's likely not the only goal.
- If you have friends with good work habits, or friends who are in some of your classes, feel free to study with them!
- If you have work to do, and you find yourself walking over to your friend's dorm room for social time, ask yourself: are you doing this to procrastinate or avoid work? Are you doing this due to FOMO (fear of missing out)?
- Many students will experience FOMO if they miss out on a party or a big game.

- Realistically, there will always be another party, and there will always be another game. But today might be the only opportunity to study for a test that determines a huge part of your grade, and there won't always be another test or assignment to make that up.

Set boundaries

Most students respect their friends when they say “I can't hang out right now, I need to study,” but feel nervous to set the same boundary. Are you one of those people?

- If your friends care about you, they will absolutely understand that sometimes you need to put your work ahead of spending time with them. They may complain a little bit, which can be a good thing — they like having you around!
- But if they refuse to respect your boundary, and put up a major fight about it, it may be worth re-evaluating how good these friends really are for you.
- That doesn't mean you need to ditch them completely — many people have friends in college that they'll hang out with sometimes, but wouldn't invite to their hypothetical wedding.
- These friendships are fine to have — just don't sacrifice your grades and/or your future to keep them!

Can you study TOO much?

Yes! While you should spend the appropriate amount of time studying, going overboard is counterproductive.

- Long study sessions can be boring and leave you feeling fatigued.
- When you're bored or tired, your mind will wander more.
- If your mind is wandering too much, it's just wasted study time at that point.
- This is why spending an entire day or two cramming before a big exam is not the way to go.
- You're not going to absorb as much information, and the prospect of studying will feel stressful and impossible.

- Learn how long you tend to concentrate on different subjects so that you can schedule focused, effective study sessions.
- If you know that your bandwidth for reading biology notes or a philosophy textbook is 2-3 hours, then plan study periods that are that long.
- PLAN! Use a planner, use checklists, use sticky notes. It's easier to keep track of things if they exist outside your head.

Take breaks

Rather than marathon study sessions, try breaking it up by building in rest periods and rewards for yourself.

- Break down big tasks into smaller chunks, and take breaks at logical stopping points. If you're writing a lab report with six sections, take a break after section three, and another break after you finish but before you edit.
- Then go to the dining hall and get some ice cream, drop by a friend's dorm room for a quick chat, or call a family member.
- Successful rewards are activities that make you feel good and can be done quickly!

Work-life balance

You may have heard adults talking about work-life balance, but it applies to you, too! In addition to assessing your ability to concentrate on certain tasks, you'll need to learn how to balance your personal life with your schoolwork.

- To be successful in college, you need to devote a significant amount of your time to attending class and studying outside the classroom, but you also have personal commitments like family, friends, a job, and extracurriculars.
- You'll be more successful in the long run if you strike a healthy balance that incorporates these other parts of life in your schedule.

How Does **What You Put Into Your Body** Impact Your Mood?

What you'll learn

- How to judge the impact of foods, drinks, and substances on your mood
- Positive and negative examples of foods, drinks, and substances that can impact your mood
- How to make changes to your diet or substance use that are likely to be effective

Different foods, drinks, and other substances can have major effects on your mood — both short term and long term. It can be easy to ignore.

What's the connection?

- Many of your neurotransmitters — the chemicals that your brain uses to operate and send signals to your body — are made in your stomach, using the food you eat as raw materials.
- As much as 95% of your serotonin — the main neurotransmitter responsible for mood and energy — is linked to your stomach!

Making the connection

- The only way to learn what works for you is to be honest with yourself. How do you feel after consuming something?
- Scan your body. What do you feel in your head, neck, shoulders, stomach, and limbs?
- What are you feeling emotionally? What kinds of thoughts are you having? How have your thoughts and mood changed since before your meal?
- Begin to notice: How do you feel when you eat too much? Many people experience stomach pain or discomfort, heartburn, or indigestion.
- Begin to notice: How do you feel when you eat too little? Many people experience fatigue, headaches, irritability, and stomach discomfort.

- Other people may eat/drink/ingest certain things without obvious consequences, but that doesn't mean that they aren't feeling the consequences on the inside. It also doesn't mean you could consume the same things and get the same results.

Foods that leave most people feeling better

- Veggies and whole grains that contain complex carbohydrates and fiber make you feel full and give you long-term energy.
- Proteins — lean meats, poultry, beans, lentils, nuts, fish, eggs, dairy — also provide energy and make you feel full. Your muscles are made from them, and when you digest them, they break down into the chemicals that make up your neurotransmitters.
- Fruits are sweet, provide flavor and texture, and contain many nutrients that processed snacks will not.
- Tea — as an alternative to coffee or energy drinks — contains less caffeine than coffee, but will still perk you up. It also contains many healthy chemicals such as antioxidants — which protect against chronic diseases like cancer — and L-Theanine, which is believed to improve focus and reduce anxiety.

What leaves most people feeling worse

- Soda, energy drinks, and other foods high in refined sugar may give an initial boost, but it's often followed by a crash, leaving you tired and irritable.
- Deep-fried, fatty, and processed foods — like fries, fast food, chips, and anything that's obviously greasy — can slow you down and cause stomach discomfort.
- Gluten-based foods can produce similar effects for some people.
- Lots of caffeine — like in large coffees or energy drinks — can suppress feelings of tiredness, but the more you consume, the more it will also make you feel jittery and anxious.
- Alcohol and other substances generally produce an initial high followed by a crash. They also tend to produce negative side effects that our brains ignore because they impair our perception.

Everything in moderation

- This does not mean you should never consume these foods or substances.
- Success in life is all about balance.
- Pay attention and be honest with yourself about your limits.

How can you make positive changes to your diet?

- Start small and be fair to yourself. You don't need to change everything all at once.
- Drastic changes are extremely hard and actually decrease your chances of succeeding.
- If you go to the fried food station at the dining hall every day, start by trying to skip it one day per week.
- If you stock your room with snacks, try replacing one item with your favorite fruit or vegetable — the one you're most likely to eat.
- Where can you sneak in healthy foods without changing the overall taste of your meal? Can you add lettuce to a sandwich? Can you eat an orange instead of drinking a juice?
- Any time you do eat a healthy alternative, take a second to notice how you feel after.

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How Do **Alcohol** **and Other Drugs** Impact Your Mind and Body?

What you'll learn

- Some general info about mind-altering substances
- Things you may not know about some specific types of mind-altering substances
- The consequences of mixing certain substances

While your college experience probably won't look like a scene out of *Animal House*, the truth of the matter is that it's a time when some kids will experiment with drugs and alcohol. Whether you plan to partake or not, it's best to go in understanding the effects of mind-altering substances.

General info

- Most drugs produce an initial high, then a crash.
- When you consume a drug that mimics brain chemicals, your brain responds by producing LESS of those chemicals to try to maintain homeostasis, or a natural balance.
- When the drug wears off, you wind up with less of the chemicals than you need, which can lead you to crave more of the drug to return to an artificial level. And so begins the cycle of addiction.
- Consuming drugs and alcohol can reduce inhibitions and result in actions or behaviors that you will later regret — or even worse, are unsafe.
- Thanks to social media, anything you do can end up shared far and wide. Don't let one night of recklessness negatively impact your future.

Alcohol

- Alcohol is a depressant, which means it slows down brain function so there may be less worry, but also less ability to think things through.
- It can produce intense emotions including euphoria or rage.
- Extended use increases symptoms of depression and anxiety.
- Alcohol COUNTERACTS the effects of most antidepressant medications, and has potentially dangerous interactions with others.
- Do not mix alcohol and monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs) like socarboxazid (Marplan), phenelzine (Nardil), or selegiline (Emsam) because it can cause dangerous spikes in blood pressure.
- Do not mix alcohol and prescription anti-anxiety drugs — benzodiazepines like Xanax or Klonopin — or prescription painkillers. They all suppress lung function, and the combination can be fatal!
- If you've heard about celebrities who have died from an overdose, very often they were mixing depressants.

Stimulants

- Stimulants include methamphetamine, cocaine, misused ADHD meds, and even nicotine or large quantities of caffeine.
- They speed up brain function, which can increase focus and motivation, but can also cause jitteriness, increased anxiety, paranoia, and heart palpitations.
- Large quantities can lead to temporary psychosis or — in some cases — full-on psychotic breaks.
- Nicotine — the chemical compound that makes cigarettes highly addictive — produces an initial rush, then a crash which can only be fixed with — you guessed it — more nicotine.
- NOTE: Mixing stimulants and depressants — called speedballing — or combining two or more from one category, greatly increases their risks!

Marijuana

Marijuana goes by many names, including pot, weed, hash, ganga, grass, reefer, bud, cannabis, chronic, and many, many more.

- It can function as a depressant, stimulant, hallucinogen, or any combination.
- It often produces a high, including euphoria; some people report painkilling properties.
- Marijuana can increase social anxiety, produce full-on paranoia, or lead to panic attacks.
- It can also trigger psychotic episodes, especially when mixed with ADHD medications or other stimulants.
- Marijuana interferes with focus and motivation. While you're high, you feel good despite not solving your problems. Then when you're not high, your brain produces less of the chemicals it uses to motivate you.

Hallucinogens

- Hallucinogens — also called psychedelics — include psilocybin mushrooms (shrooms), LSD (acid), DMT, PCP (angel dust), and MDMA (ecstasy).
- Some psychedelics cause hallucinations, and they tend to affect all the senses — often intensifying them.
- These hallucinations and sensations can feel very good in the moment — or very, very bad.
- Hallucinogens have plenty of side effects, but are less likely to cause addiction than anything else on this list.
- If you have a family history of psychosis, BEWARE. Psychedelics can trigger psychotic episodes.
- Their effects are EXTREMELY dependent on your mindset and environment. If you are sad, nervous, or in an unfamiliar setting, the likelihood of a “bad trip” is much higher. The only way to end a bad trip is to wait it out.

Why Do Some Students **Drop Out** — and How Can You Avoid It?

What you'll learn

- How many college students fail to graduate
- What are some of the risk factors that lead students to drop out
- How to protect yourself against those risks

You got into college, congratulations! But you're not out of the woods yet.

- In the U.S., nearly a quarter of first-time bachelor's degree students will drop out in their first year.
- Nearly a quarter of students who complete their bachelor's degree will take more than 4 years to do so.
- Including non-bachelor's degrees (like associate degrees), nearly 40% of students will drop out before graduation.

Why do some students drop out — and what can you do about it?

Bad grades

- Students who do poorly in their early classes are more likely to drop out.
- Check your grades early and often — and be honest with yourself about how you're doing in a class.
- If you're at risk of failing, talk to your academic advisor. See if your school offers free tutoring. Find a study group, or go to your professor's (or TA's) office hours.
- If necessary, drop the class early on so you can devote more time to the rest of your classes.

Be honest with yourself about why you're failing — are you partying most nights? Staying up late playing video games? Spending hours per day on social media?

- Can you change those habits on your own? Do you need outside help — like a therapist or support group — to overcome them?
- The earlier you identify this, the more hope there is for support — and the more likely that you won't drop out.
- Always hand in your assignments on time. Earning a 50% is better than a 0 and may even allow you to pass.
- Some professors do not accept late assignments, so you may want to prioritize their assignments over others.
- But always prioritize assignments that are weighted more heavily towards your final grade.

Mental health and learning challenges

- Students with mental health and learning challenges may be more likely to struggle their first term in college.
- If you fall into that category, be aware that you might need more support to perform as well as you would like.
- You can go to the counseling center or the disabilities office, depending on your needs.

Low self-awareness

- Students with low self-awareness — AKA students who overestimate their abilities — are more likely to drop out.
- Again, be honest with yourself — and those close to you. Keeping challenges to yourself in college makes it harder to overcome them.
- If you think you already know the material so don't need to study, but then get a 50% on the test, what's your reaction? Do you learn your lesson and study for the next exam? Or do you blame the test, do the same thing next time, or just give up?
- If there are other, outside factors influencing your performance, acknowledge them. How likely are they to change?
- Are you missing class because of your work shifts, or are you staying up late and sleeping through early classes? Do your sports obligations take up too much of your time? Are there major stressors in your family that you can't control?
- Go back to the suggestions in the “bad grades” section.
- Also, be aware of what your peers are doing to study — or not study.
- Just because your roommate seems to be doing well with minimal studying doesn't mean the same applies to you.
- For all you know, they lack self-awareness and are not, in fact, doing well.
- Try to gravitate towards peers in your class who seem to be paying attention, taking notes, and studying more often.
- If you follow what others are doing and are not in tune with what you need, you are less likely to succeed.
- Understand that you will likely need to work harder than you did in high school in order to achieve the same grades.
- If you find that you're working with the same study habits or studying less than you did in high school, that should signal that something isn't right.

Lack of Connection

- Students who don't connect with their peers and community are more likely to drop out.
- Put yourself out there!
- If you live in a dorm on-campus, leave your door open sometimes. When you see your floormates hanging out in a common area, join them and ask what's up.
- Join a club or organization. If you have an interest — or one you'd like to pursue — chances are others do too!
- Go to sporting events or other school activities.
- Sit next to someone in a lecture and strike up a conversation before or after class. If you need something to talk about, reference a funny or unusual thing that happened in class!

Race and socioeconomic

- Social, economic, and cultural factors — like working long hours, coming from a low-income family, and being a member of an ethnic minority — increase the likelihood of dropping out.
- Black college students have the highest dropout rate — 49.5% according to some studies — of any demographic.
- Experiences of discrimination are believed to contribute to drop-outs.
- This is obviously not within your control, but it's important to know the obstacles and plan accordingly.
- Wealthy members of the majority group — i.e., in America, white people from high-income families — have certain advantages.
- They are less likely to face discrimination, may have gone to the best schools, may not need to have a job in college, and may be able to afford outside, private tutors.
- Meanwhile if you are a wealthy person of color, you might have fancy tutors but still find that some people make negative assumptions about you based on outdated stereotypes.
- If you work long hours, consider taking a smaller course load, even if it means registering as a part-time student. You may graduate in more than four years, but so do many others, and you'll have an easier time financially and with your studies.

- Check with your financial aid office to see if your school has any resources set aside for you.
- Try not to compare yourself to people who came from a more privileged background. If you need more or different supports than they do, that does not make you “less than.”
- If you’re a person of color, consider joining clubs or organizations like the Black Student Union, Asian American Pacific Islander Club, or whatever group resonates. Realistically, you may experience challenges that your rich, white counterparts don’t — but you don’t have to face them alone.
- If you face discrimination, you can report it to the school. Your student handbook should detail the procedure, or you can ask your RA or look for the Title IX Coordinator, Office of Equity and Inclusion, or similar.
- If you don’t feel heard, you can file a discrimination complaint with the federal Office of Civil Rights.

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The Grind (building or fixing the frame)

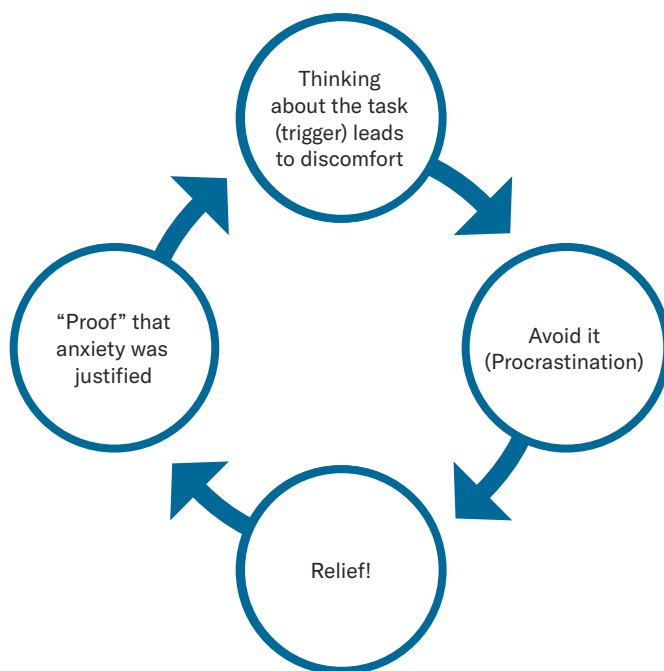


Child Mind
Institute

Why Do **People With Mental Health Problems, Learning Disabilities,** and Especially **BOTH,** Procrastinate?

Cycle of avoidance and negative reinforcement

Everyone procrastinates sometimes. But for folks with mental health and learning challenges, the struggle is REAL. The cycle of avoidance and negative reinforcement explains how and why we develop the habit of procrastination.



What you'll learn

- How people with MHPs and LDs develop the habit of procrastinating
- Some steps you can take to overcome procrastination

- If you have a history of mental health and learning challenges you may have experienced discomfort around school obligations.
- When you think about a new assignment or task, you are reminded of times in the past when you had difficulty completing an assignment, experienced frustration about an assignment, or were ashamed of your grade on an assignment.
- Accordingly, thinking about the new task leads to more discomfort.
- This brings on an urge to avoid, or procrastinate.
- When you procrastinate, you will likely experience temporary relief from the discomfort or anxiety associated with the assignment.
- Unfortunately, this “proves” that the discomfort was justified. Thinking about the task made me uncomfortable, and doing something else made me feel better!
- As a result, the next time you think about the task, you are likely to feel even more discomfort, and the cycle will repeat again.

How to overcome procrastination

There is good news! The more a student can overcome procrastination, complete work, and get positive praise for it, the less that work will be automatically associated with discomfort.

- Getting the academic support necessary to ensure that you produce work that reflects your actual ability (not limited by your mental health and learning challenges) will make the work easier, improve your self-esteem, and ensure you get the grades you deserve!
- Success breeds more success and motivation, so starting with small goals and working towards a bigger one can help to fight off the urge to procrastinate.
- Similarly, building in accountability (scheduling tutoring sessions or study groups, for example) will make it easier to get work done and help to break the cycle.
- Figure out how you procrastinate, and make that harder. Do you snack instead of working? Don't work where there's food! Do you pick up your phone and scroll instead of working? Put your phone in your bag, don't leave it out on your desk.
- Don't plan to do things at the last minute. Instead, plan ahead and budget in plenty of time so you don't have to rush.
- To prevent procrastination, use small rewards for yourself as incentives. Maybe after 45 minutes you can check social media, or after three chapters you can go get a snack. Choose quick but satisfying rewards that will fill your bucket and motivate you.

What Are “**Accountability Structures**” and Why Do You Need Them?

What you'll learn

- The benefits of making promises to other people to hold yourself accountable
- Who to turn to for accountability
- What to do if this strategy isn't working for you, or is causing you more stress

Sweet, sweet freedom

For most college students, the transition to college represents a dramatic increase in freedom and responsibility. Many students assume this means they need to be completely independent.

- This is a fallacy! The transition to independence is a slow, steady one, and even “independent” people still rely on others for support.
- When you were younger, your guardians handled everything for you.
- As you got older, you started to do many things without them, but you likely still relied on them for some support (i.e., shelter, food, and some amount of monetary support).
- You are not alone at college, and while your parents aren't there it doesn't mean that you need to face new challenges in isolation.

What is accountability and who am I accountable to?

One of the strongest motivators for overcoming challenges is accountability, i.e., promising someone (whose opinion matters to you) that you will complete your task.

- This is true whether that promise is “I will attend my 9am class on time,” or “I will complete my science homework before the deadline.”
- Your professor may already expect you to do these things, but you may not have a personal relationship with them. If you cut a class, your participation grade may go down, but you may not have to look them in the eye and feel shame that you disappointed them.
- Your parents may already expect these things from you, but those are the people you're trying to gain independence from! Besides, they're not at school with you, and you can avoid their calls if you choose to do so. You can't rely on that expectation to motivate you when you're up against a wall.
- You may already expect these things from yourself, but it's very easy to distract yourself when you realize you're not meeting your own expectations. You can just scroll TikTok, drop by a friend's dorm, stream a show, play a video game...
- But if you make a deal with your friends to complete homework together or meet for coffee before class, you're more likely to follow through on those promises!

What are accountability structures?

Accountability Structures refer to the idea of making promises to build scaffolding around yourself. Don't rely on yourself to get things done in isolation. Take advantage of the people around you!

- Humans are social animals. We don't like breaking our promises and disappointing the people around us. If your friend knocks on your door and asks, "Ready to work?" you're much more likely to do that work than if you just glanced at your watch and thought, "Oh yeah, I wanted to do some work before it got too late."
- Also, if you're having trouble motivating yourself, you can talk to your friend about what you're feeling, and they can support you.

What if they're not working?

- If you feel like you're constantly disappointing people and can't keep your promises, and you're experiencing constant shame about this, you might be experiencing depression. Reach out to your college counseling center for support!
- Yes, a big piece of college is developing independence, but everything you're experiencing on campus right now is new to you. You're still learning how to be an adult.
- Also, the truth of the matter is that full-grown adults need help too — from coworkers, therapists, family, and other loved ones. Seeking out help when you need it is just a part of being a successful, thriving adult. And if you have ADHD, a learning disorder, or challenges with mental health, it's especially important to get comfortable advocating for yourself.

What Are **Some Subtle Signs** You Might Be Procrastinating?

What you'll learn

- Ways you can tell you're procrastinating on something, even if it feels like you're being productive
- How to identify "tricks" your brain plays on you to make you think you're not procrastinating, when you really are

Everyone procrastinates sometimes. It can be crystal clear, like when you're sitting in front of your computer but texting your friend "I don't wanna write this paper!" But other times procrastination can be sneakier, even disguising itself as productivity. Here are some signs to look out for:

Are you filling your day with low-priority tasks?

- Checking something off on your to-do list — even something minor — can help you feel like you've accomplishing something.
- Sometimes this can help kickstart your productivity.
- But if you find yourself checking off only the low-priority items, then it's a sign that you may be alleviating your anxiety but eating away at the time you have to get something more important done.

Are you reading e-mails, texts, or assignment descriptions over multiple times without responding or putting pen to paper?

- If you're reading and re-reading, it may feel like you're getting something done.
- But we often don't get started on important tasks or decisions because we don't know how, or we're worried we might make a mistake.
- If you're not sure how to respond to something or get started, ask someone — like a friend or professor — for guidance.

Has a really important task been on your to-do list for over a week?

- This is a major red flag that indicates this task is bringing up some dread for you, and you likely need to ask someone to help you get started.

Are you actually starting a big assignment, but then heading out to get something to eat, going to get some coffee, texting with friends, or watching cat videos?

- It's great that you're actually breaking ground on this!
- But take that first step further.
- Get at least an hour or two in, and then reward yourself with social interactions, a treat from the coffee shop, or some online videos.

Are you adding tasks to your to-do list today? How important are they?

- Chances are, these new tasks are not as imperative as what you already have on your plate, and can be handled later.
- Procrastination sometimes looks like doing something fun or mindless, but it can also look like doing work that's unrelated to something more important.

Are you telling yourself, “I need to be in the right mood to do this?”

- Reality check: You won’t be. There’s never a “right mood” or “right time” to get a tough task done. If it wasn’t enticing a week ago, it won’t be enticing today.
- Think about what’s holding you back and try to come up with strategies to help, like breaking up a big task into smaller components.

The first step towards combating procrastination is recognizing you’re doing it in the first place. The more we know ourselves and our motivations, the better we can work towards our goals.

We Have so Much **Free Time** in **College**, so Why Is Procrastination That Bad, Anyway?

What you'll learn

- Negative consequences that come from procrastination, even if you **DO** have time later
- Benefits of starting something early or tackling it head on

Whereas in high school it may have felt like every moment was planned for you, in college there is a lot of more freedom. With all that time, you can afford to put things off a little, right? Wrong! A big part of learning how to adult is responsibly managing your time so there's room for both work and play. Here are some consequences of procrastination:

Increased Stress

With studying, waiting until the last minute not only leaves you with less time to practice the material, but it also increases your stress level.

- Stress makes it harder to concentrate and encode what you need to learn.
- Stress also makes it more likely that you're going to continue to procrastinate.
- Stress increases chances that your learning will go in one ear and out the other.
- So if the material on that test is important later in the semester, or for a class next semester, you likely won't remember it after the test.
- Also, it's more effective — and less daunting — to study for short periods of time over several days than it is to study during one long and exhausting session.

Lower-quality writing

With writing, waiting until the last minute practically ensures an inferior final product.

- If you put off an assignment until the last minute, you'll likely be in a rush. This makes it more likely that you'll make mistakes.
- If you plan ahead, you can bounce your thesis and other ideas off of classmates or your professor. This can help you home in on a strong idea for the paper.
- Starting earlier also gives you the opportunity to submit a draft before the final due date
- Finally, an earlier start makes it easier to proofread and fine-tune your ideas.

Uncomfortable situations

Work isn't the only thing we can procrastinate! With conflicts and other uncomfortable social situations, ignoring the issue leaves others waiting for your response and can make things worse rather than better.

- We usually hesitate to respond to tricky texts or emails because we're worried about another person's reaction.
- But by ignoring the issue, we make it more likely that the other person will be more frustrated, disappointed, or left feeling unheard and unimportant.

-
- If we don't know what to say or we're hesitating to commit to something, that's okay! Saying that to the other person lets them know they're still on our minds.
 - Admitting that a situation is hard for us can also open up the discussion, and the other person may have ideas they can add to help problem solve.

So How Do You **Fight** **Procrastination?**

What you'll learn

- Strategies for fighting procrastination
- Tips for eliminating distractions
- Ways to keep yourself accountable

Okay, so we've made it clear that procrastination is a part of life. But with the right strategies, you can train yourself to get better at prioritizing. Some of these tips may be helpful, some may not work for you. It will likely take some trial and error — and practice — to fight procrastination when it rears its head.

Plan rewards for yourself

Think about what you'd rather be doing — then hold the things you want hostage.

- Choose a way to reward yourself after you complete the task you've been avoiding. It can be ice cream, time with friends, watching the newest episode of a show you love — anything that will fill your bucket.
- Withhold what you want to do until your more stressful tasks are completed.
- That way, desirable tasks become a motivating reward.
- It's much harder the other way around. We all know how easy it is for one episode to become a binge session. Suddenly, your to-do list is out the window.

Get organized

As early in the semester as you can, make lists of all the tasks you need to accomplish and the dates by which they need to be done.

- Add these dates to your calendar or planner.
- This will help you split your time so you aren't forced to choose between completing one task or another.
- Besides due dates, try to plan backwards and mark when you should start studying, writing, or gathering research. This will help keep things from sneaking up on you.
- You can also make a daily or weekly to-do list to help you keep track. Think about everything you need to do, then prioritize them.
- Whether it's answering an email, calling someone, reading a report, or writing a paper, your goal should always be to do your most difficult tasks first.
- When you lift the burden of a more difficult task, it eases your stress, leaves you feeling accomplished and good about yourself, and gives you motivation to do the next thing.

Eliminate distractions

We know, this is easier said than done! Distractions used to be far less of a problem, but our phones and other devices make it so that we can be distracted anytime, anywhere. Plus, if you live on campus you never know what noise or hijinks will pull you from your work.

- When you want to be distracted — from a stressful task, perhaps — you will be.
- Shut off push notifications on your smartphone.
- Keep your web browser closed. Some software programs will even prevent you from using the internet at set intervals if you find you can't resist it.
- You can even set your phone to airplane mode.
- Once your study period or task is complete, then open up your texts and other messages.
- Wear noise canceling headphones to keep it quiet, or listen to music or sounds that help you focus. Try searching your favorite streaming platform for "study music" or "focus music" if you need suggestions.

Be a detective

It might take some digging, but one of the best ways to battle procrastination is to understand why you don't want to complete a task.

- The reasons we do things — and don't do things — may seem obvious, but our conscious minds can cloud reality to placate us.
- Our conscious minds come up with reasonable explanations that aren't necessarily true, and we accept them so we can move on and feel better.
- Keep asking yourself: Why don't you want to make that phone call? Why don't you want to write that essay? Why don't you want to go to class?
- It may be helpful to talk it over with a friend or therapist.
- Whatever the underlying reasons, when you are aware of them, they'll lose some of their power.

Consider why it matters

Sometimes we need to take a step back and look at the bigger picture. A reminder of why it's important to get the task done can be a helpful reality check.

- Remind yourself why a task is important.
- What are the positive outcomes?
- What are the worst consequences of not completing it?
- Too much anxiety can be paralyzing, but a little can be motivating.
- If your anxiety is making you feel overwhelmed, reach out to someone for help. Yes, you're an "adult" now, but adults need support, too.
- Often, not doing an assignment can be more uncomfortable than actually starting and finishing it.

Eat well

We're sure family members are already bugging you about whether you've been eating your fruits and vegetables — but they have a point. A nutritious diet helps you function at your best.

- Eating well releases serotonin, which helps to regulate your sleep, helps you think more clearly, and helps to boost or regulate your mood.
- Eat enough to feel satisfied, but not so much that you become sluggish.
- When you study, bring snacks and drinks to stay energized and hydrated.

Get enough sleep

This is a tough one for many college kids, but the benefits of getting enough sleep are immense! Ensure you have adequate energy to get everything done.

- It's much harder to concentrate or think well if you are tired.
- When you're sleep deprived, even simple tasks can take twice as long.
- Get at least 7-8 hours of sleep each night.
- Set a consistent bedtime and morning routine to help get this in motion.
- Silencing notifications on your phone after a certain time can help.

Picture it

Thinking about not only what you need to do, but how you will feel when you complete it, can be a surprisingly powerful tool. Call it manifesting. Call it positive self-talk. We call it worth a shot.

- Before you go to sleep, remind yourself of what you want to accomplish tomorrow.
- What are the steps you need to take?
- Then, envision yourself getting those tasks done.
- What are the positive outcomes? How does it feel?
- When athletes and other professionals rehearse what they need to do to be successful — both in their minds and physically — it helps them to achieve that success.

Set a schedule

Many people find routines super helpful. So if there's a task you tend to habitually procrastinate, try making it part of your routine.

- If you put off doing laundry until you have no clothes left, choose a laundry day and stick to it.
- If school work gets pushed to the side, schedule a regular study time. It can be alone, with a tutor, or with a group.
- Put it on your calendar or reminders app.
- If you do the same thing at the same time every week, it becomes habit and much easier to do over time.

Make yourself accountable

Once you've come up with a plan to stop procrastinating, don't keep it to yourself! Tell other people.

- If you have a hard time holding yourself accountable, ask someone else to help.
- If they see you playing video games in the common room when you had planned to study, they can give you a hard time and motivate you to head to the library.
- Or if a friend is struggling with procrastination, become accountability buddies. Check in with each other or set study dates to keep each other on track.
- Many people in college feel like they're on their own, but you don't have to feel that way. Chances are, you and your peers may be able to work on the same assignment together.

You're Having a **Conflict With** **Your Roommate.** What Should You Do?

If you're a first-year student living on campus, chances are you'll have at least one roommate. And chances are you'll find yourselves in at least a conflict or two, even if you've become the best of friends. Before you try to crash on a friend's floor or run home, here are some strategies to try.

Communicate

First, try to solve the problem by speaking to them yourself! Often, conflicts arise when there is a miscommunication or when one person doesn't realize what they are doing is bothersome. As an example, let's say the roommate is not being quiet at night and it's making it hard for you to sleep. Try dialectical behavior therapy's DEAR MAN skill (from the 2015 DBT manual by Dr. Marsha Linehan):

- **Describe the facts.** "I have early classes most days, so I try to be in bed by midnight so I can wake up by 8. But you're often up past 3am playing video games or laughing at memes on your phone."
- **Express how you feel.** "This leaves me feeling frustrated and annoyed because my grades are important to me, and I don't learn as well when I'm tired."
- **Assert yourself.** "Could you please either start going to bed earlier on weeknights, or find another place to hang out after midnight, like a common room or a friend's place?"

What you'll learn

- **Strategies for managing roommate conflict**
- **Where to go for help if you can't solve the problem yourself**
- **What to do if nothing else works**

- **Reinforce what's in it for them.** "If you do, you can stay up as late as you want on Friday and Saturday night."
- **Stay mindful of your goal.** Don't allow yourself to be distracted! If they aren't hearing you, choose a respectful and concise phrase — like "I'd appreciate it if you could keep it down after midnight" — and keep coming back to your assertion like a broken record.
- **Appear confident.** Stand tall, use a confident tone of voice, and maintain eye contact. Practice ahead of time if you're nervous!
- **Negotiate.** If you can't get all of what you want, try to get some of it instead. Maybe they can have lights off by midnight only on the nights before you have 9am classes.

Seek outside help

If this fails, you may need the help of someone in authority to help resolve the conflict.

Talk to a Resident Assistant (RA)

- Most dorms have an RA, dorm parent, or some other point person for dorm-related issues. Their job includes helping to manage roommate disputes.
- They will often mediate conflicts and can enforce any official rules your roommate may be violating.

Talk to someone higher up

- If your conversation with your RA does not yield the results you're looking for, it may be necessary to talk to someone higher up in the RA office.
- This could be a senior RA, faculty supervisor, the office of housing, or dean of students.

Request a room transfer

- If all else fails, most schools have a system for requesting an official room transfer.
- If the problem is bad enough, while you wait for the transfer to come through, see if there is anywhere else you can stay! Friends may be happy to let you sleep on their couch.

You Live at Home and Are Fighting With Your Parents. What Should You Do?

What you'll learn

- Strategies for managing conflict with your parents now that you're in college
- Where to seek help if you cannot solve the problem yourself
- What to do if nothing else works

While dorm life can be fun, there are many perks to living at home during college. With so many changes, keeping some things constant can make it a smoother transition for some — not to mention it typically saves a ton of money. But even though you're living in the same house with the same family, there will still likely be a shift in dynamics. It may take some time to reach a new equilibrium and there is likely to be some conflict along the way.

You're not alone

First, you should know: this is VERY COMMON and you're NOT alone!

- You're in a completely new phase of life, with all new responsibilities and expectations.
- Yet you're still living in your childhood home, sleeping in the same bed, eating food from the same kitchen — many families have trouble finding their new normal!
- So what can you do? First, try to solve the problem by advocating for yourself!

Problem solve and communicate

As an example, let's say your parents have been scolding you for spending less time with them or not joining them for meals. Try the strategies outlined in dialectical behavior therapy's DEAR MAN skill (from the 2015 DBT manual by Dr. Marsha Linehan):

- **Describe the facts.** "I know I still live at home, but I have more demands on my time than I did in high school. My classes are harder, they assign more homework, and I'm in a new environment without my old friends. I need to spend more time on my school obligations and building my social life, which leaves me less time for family time, but you complain when I'm not around."
- **Express how you feel.** "This leaves me feeling frustrated and annoyed because my grades and social life are important to me. It also feels unfair that you are mad at me for doing the things I need to do. It's not my fault college is hard, and it feels like you're blaming me for things I can't control."
- **Assert yourself.** "Could you please stop scolding me for not being around as much as I used to be?"
- **Reinforce what's in it for them.** "If you stop scolding me, I promise to make time for you once per week, every week, except for when I have mid-terms or finals to prepare for. We can schedule a family activity on Saturday afternoons."

- **Stay mindful of your goal.** Don't allow yourself to be distracted! Keep coming back to your assertion like a "broken record." Many parents in this situation are hurting — it's hard for them to spend less time with you. They may say things to appeal to your emotions, so don't lose sight of your goal!
- **Appear confident.** Stand tall, use a confident tone of voice, and maintain eye contact. Practice ahead of time if you're nervous!
- **Negotiate.** If you can't get all of what you want, try to get some of it instead. Maybe they'll say they "promise to try," in which case you can tell them you'll schedule an exciting plan with them once they succeed!

Next steps

If this fails, you may need the help of someone outside your immediate family.

- Talk to your extended family! Do you have any aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, or close family friends who can support you? Ask them to talk to your parents.
- What about your larger community? Do you belong to a church or religious organization? Are you close to other people in your neighborhood or apartment building? Involving a community leader could be especially helpful!
- This will be more effective if the other people try to be understanding of both sides. They can validate where your parents are coming from while also standing up for your needs!

Take some space

If things are getting worse rather than better, know when to take a break.

- As a last resort, do you have any friends you could stay with? Maybe some friends who live on-campus? Does any of your extended family live nearby?
- It may be easier to have the tough conversations with your parents about boundaries when you have the option to leave. However, this may also push them harder. Be very careful before you move out. Talk to others and get advice before you try this!

You **Failed** a **Midterm** — Now What?

What you'll learn

- First steps to take if you failed a midterm
- Problem-solving strategies based on whether you can still pass the class
- How to recover if you need to drop the class

You just failed a midterm. You're screwed, right? Not necessarily! Here's what to do.

Take a breath

- Before you panic or take action, just stop and take a breath.
- Breathe in so that it fills up your lungs and your belly expands, then breathe out sloooooowly. This will slow down your autonomic nervous system and help you relax.
- When people feel stressed or threatened, their brains usually try to speed things up — the famous fight or flight reaction. While this was helpful for our evolutionary ancestors, it won't help you deal with your current situation.

Figure out your overall grade

- If your school/professor uses an online tool like Blackboard, Google Classroom, etc., this may be easy to figure out!
- If not, you can calculate it yourself. Check your syllabus to figure out what percentage of your grade that midterm was worth. You can search for online tools to help you calculate your weighted average.
- Ask your professor. They'll know better than anyone how you're doing in class and what it will take to pass.

Can you still pass?

- Chances are that failing a midterm isn't enough to sink you completely.
- Based on your current position and weight of the midterm is it still possible to pass?
- Will you need to get 95 or higher on everything you submit the rest of the way? Or can you pull a grade you're happy with if you just get 80s the rest of the way?
- If you have a scholarship, do you need to maintain a particular GPA?

If you think you **CAN** still pass the class, make a concrete plan

- Don't just say you'll plan to do better next time — that isn't a plan!
- There are concrete steps you can take to have a stronger second half of the semester.
- Schedule the tutoring sessions. Email the professor and commit to going to office hours. Ask about possible extra credit opportunities.
- If the professor can recognize the extra steps you're taking to get back on track, that can also go a long way toward helping you pass.

- Will you need to drop an extracurricular or miss some practices or rehearsals? This is a good time to think about priorities.
- Think of it this way: if you fail, you may not be able to able to participate in that activity anymore anyway, so some short-term adjustments might be necessary for the long-term benefits.

Get extra support

- Check your school's tutoring center. Are you willing to work with a tutor for the rest of the term?
- Can you attend your professor's or teaching assistant's office hours?
- Do you have a friend who seems to be doing well? Can you study with them?
- Do you have other obligations that would prevent you from doing these things? Do you work full- or part-time? Are you a member of an organization that demands some of your time? Have you taken on too much?

If you CAN'T still pass the class, consider dropping it or switching it to pass/fail

- Most colleges or universities will still give you the opportunity to drop a class for several weeks after midterms.
- You may wind up with a "W" or incomplete on your transcript, but this is not calculated into your GPA.

- Similarly, most colleges or universities will give you several weeks to switch classes from letter grades to pass/fail. An F won't look great, but at many schools it won't be factored into your GPA (check your school policies to confirm).
- This cannot be done for every class. If you have questions, contact your academic advisor or advisor's office!

But if you drop the class, won't you be behind on your credits?

- Maybe... but that's okay!
- If you came in with any credit from high school courses or AP exams, you still may be on schedule to graduate.
- If not, you can always overload in a future semester, or take summer classes.
- Very often these options are cheaper than your typical classes anyway!
- Consider taking summer courses towards your requirements at a local community college or online.
- Just check with your academic advising office to ensure they'll accept the credits!
- Also, fewer than 50% of students graduate from college in four years. You may want or need to consider a slower pace.

What Should You Expect From Finals Week?

What you'll learn

- What “finals week” and “reading period” actually mean
- Strategies for making the most of your time during these weeks
- Tips for how to study for finals

Reading Period

- Typically, there is a short “reading period” between the last day of classes and the first day of finals week.
- It can be anywhere from 2 to 7 days, depending on the school.
- There are no classes during reading period.
- Reading period is meant to be used for studying what you’ve already learned, so you will not have any new work assigned.
- However, you may have final papers or projects that were assigned before the semester ended that are due during this period (or even during finals week itself). This will typically happen instead of a final exam.
- Professors or their TAs will very likely hold office hours or review sessions during reading week. Go to those. Sometimes they will indicate exactly what will be on the exams and what you need to study.
- Some professors will have their final exam on the last day of class, rather than during finals week. This should be clearly stated in the syllabus, and they will likely remind you.
- Because some classes may have in-class finals, and other classes may have final projects or papers instead of classes, every student’s finals week will look different.
- Some students may have zero final exams, some may have one in every class — likely meaning four or five exams.
- Expect to have little control over which days your finals occur. Your hardest final might happen on the first day of Finals week or the last. You may have two finals the first day and one final the last day.
- At most schools, if you wind up with three finals scheduled on the same day (this is VERY unlikely), you should be able to have one rescheduled. Talk to one of your professors to learn how to start this process.
- At many schools it is normal to never actually see your graded, final exam. It may not be graded until several days after finals week ends, when you are home for winter or summer break. If you would like to see your test, feel free to ask your professor. Depending on the school, they may or may not be expected to share it with you.

Finals Week

- Most colleges and universities have dedicated finals weeks at the end of the fall and spring semesters.
- They occur AFTER the last day of classes, so you will have no classes during finals week.
- Some, but not necessarily all, of your classes will have final exams during finals week.

How to prepare

- Your friends with fewer finals than you may seem less concerned with studying. They may treat reading period or finals week as a time to party or play video games. Similarly, your friends with more finals than you may become totally anti-social during reading period or finals week. Both are typical, and neither should impact how much YOU want or need to study.
- Some schools actually hold their first semester finals AFTER winter holiday break. In this case, developing a study routine at home will be necessary — and either more or less challenging, depending on the dynamics at home. Feel free to enlist family support to help hold you accountable for your studying goals.
- Most professors will offer some form of study guide or review materials to help you prepare for the exam. Ideally, you should aim to learn all the material mentioned in the study guide. If it's on the study guide, it's fair game for it to be on the final exam.
- Some final exams will cover all the material you learned that semester — these are called “cumulative” exams. Some will only cover material since the midterm, or the last exam. Your syllabus should tell you which kind of exam you have for each class. If not, ask your professor!
- Only study material you'll actually need to know!
- Depending on the class, it may be helpful to review slides (if your professor posts them), your own in-class notes, and/or the textbook.
- Refer back to how the professor chose test questions on midterms, quizzes, and/or other tests. If the slides were more helpful back then, they will probably be more helpful now. The same is true for the textbook. Only you know if your effort in note-taking was consistent throughout the semester, but if it was, the same applies to those, too!
- Don't plan to sit in front of a computer and textbook for 16 consecutive hours every day. You will burn out and become less effective. Eat three meals per day. Try to stick to your usual sleep schedule. Get some exercise, even if it's just walking. The 90 minutes you spend eating and moving your body will be better for you than the 15th hour of studying would be.

How to make the most of a study session

- Choose a location where you'll be able to focus, whether that's the quiet of the library or the buzz of a coffee shop.
- Eliminate distractions. Put your phone on silent and keep it in your bag.
- If you work well with study buddies, find some! But only study with people you know are going to buckle down and work.
- Every once in a while, slow down and take some deep breaths. Breathe in so that it fills up your lungs and your belly expands, then breathe out sloooooowly. This will calm your autonomic nervous system and help you relax.
- Break tasks down into smaller pieces and set reasonable goals. If for one class, you need to learn content from six textbook chapters, six accompanying Powerpoints, and eight lectures worth of notes, don't plan to study all of that in one stretch. Do you have time for three study sessions today? Shoot for two chapters in each!
- If you're someone who has a hard time getting started, know that about yourself, and try to push through. Use strategies to help kick-start your studying, whether that means setting a timer or promising to reward yourself after.
- Focus. Don't stand up every five minutes to get some water, go to the bathroom, text a friend, make a grocery list, look up sports scores, check social media, etc.
- If you're having trouble, try setting a timer for 20 to 30 minutes, then taking a five-minute break. Sometimes having a time limit with scheduled breaks can help trick your brain into focusing.

Achieving Your Vision (filling it in)



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How Can You Set Better Goals and Stick to Them?

Goal setting is a skill that will help you in college and beyond. Working towards something specific helps you focus, stay motivated, and make strategic choices. Here's how to get started.

Set SMART Goals

- SMART stands for specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound.
- For instance, “I want to do well in physics” is too vague of a goal. “I want to improve my grade in physics from a C to a B by December” is specific, measurable, doable, and incorporates a deadline.
- Don't set too many goals at once. It's more attainable and realistic — and less overwhelming — to focus on one or a few at a time.

Write down your goals

- This will force you to clarify what you want, and more likely to motivate you to take action.
- When you actually write things down — and don't just think about doing them — you'll be more likely to carry them out.
- You can also tell them to a friend who can collaborate with you, hold you accountable, and help you succeed in accomplishing those goals.
- Break up your goal into smaller steps. What will it take to get there?

What you'll learn

- Strategies for making your goals as achievable as possible
- Strategies for actually sticking to your goals
- Common obstacles that get in the way of achieving goals

Ward off procrastination

- Be aware of when you give in to procrastination and other impediments.
- Keeping track of your actions will help you identify your triggers, so you will be more aware of the emotions attached to the behavior.
- Emotions, more often than not, are at the root of procrastination.
- You need to know why you do what you do if you want to change the behavior.

No goal can be met without motivation

- Take time to define why you want to improve your GPA, get more sleep, mend a relationship, or be more proactive and independent.
- Picture the outcome and what it will feel like to reach your goal.
- Write down your reasons for changing a habit or behavior, and then create recurring reminders in the form of notes on your desk, mirror, phone reminders, etc.

Block out time for each goal

- “I don’t have enough time” is a common excuse for us all.
- In order to realistically set yourself up for success, you have to determine how much time you need to devote to attaining your goal.
- You actually DO have the time in college, it’s just a matter of planning and commitment. You don’t want to double-book something with lower priority over your goals.

Use a planner

- Google calendar lets you block off time, color code, and even make repeating appointments. You can put all your classes on your Google calendar and then build your other time around them.
- Some people prefer paper planners.
- You can find schedule templates for Excel or Google Sheets online.
- You can also set recurring alarms in the clock app on your phone. Label them so that every Tuesday at 4:45, you get an alert that says “get to the gym by 5:30” or “tutoring session in 15 minutes.”

Know your weaknesses

- What tempts you or throws you off course? Take a good look at your behavior and identify what causes you to slip up.
- Make the slip-up behaviors harder to fall into.
- Studying in the library makes it harder to give in to social pressures.

- Turning off your phone makes it harder to access texts and social media.
- Setting multiple alarms or asking a friend to call you at a certain time makes it harder to sleep in or ignore a plan.
- Reward yourself.
- Celebrate your successes with something rewarding.
- Make sure it motivates you and is something you can look forward to.

Surround yourself with like-minded people

- Try to spend more time with those who share similar goals.
- Study with people taking the same class, work out with people who are motivated to do so, etc.
- We can’t give you blanket rules about who to seek out and who to avoid, but here are some questions to guide you:
 - What is this person hoping to get out of college? Do they have the same priorities as you?
 - Does this person encourage you to do things that are important to you — or important to them?
 - Does this person seem to make more choices based on short-term wants and impulses, or long-term needs and values?

How Can You Communicate Better to Build New Relationships?

You know those people who always bring the conversation back to themselves, only seem to complain, or never ask how you're doing? Don't be that person. Instead, learn how to build and maintain strong, positive relationships by being a good listener and showing that you care. These are skills that will serve you not only in friendships and romantic partnerships, but also in your professional life and beyond. You can even apply these strategies to communication with family and existing friends; try practicing on a sibling or bff from back home.

OARS

No, we're not suggesting you grab some oars and take your new pals out boating. OARS is a helpful acronym (from an approach to psychology called Motivational Interviewing by Miller and Rollnick, 2013) that can help guide your conversations, whether they be first time meetings or serious heart-to-hearts.

Open-ended Questions

- Ask questions where the person has to think a bit before they respond, and there are many possible answers.
- Avoid close-ended questions like "How many roommates do you have?" or "Do you like videogames?"
- Instead, try "How do you get along with your roommates?" or "What do you do for fun?"

What you'll learn

- Reflective listening skills to show the other person you're listening
- How to use validation to make the other person feel understood
- Some helpful reminders about the challenges of making friends in a new environment

Affirmations

- People are more likely to trust and spend time with people who make them feel good about themselves.
- Acknowledge positive traits or something good the other person has done, like "You clearly put a lot of work into that presentation!" and "I love that shirt, where did you get it?"

Reflections

- Show you're listening by restating what they're telling you in your own words.
- Word it as a statement, not a question.
- People like to be understood!
- For example, if someone says, "Ugh I hate my entire schedule," you could respond, "You really don't like any of your classes."
- People usually take this as an invitation to elaborate!

Summaries

- To show you're listening, you can also offer a summary of what the person just told you. This is like a reflection, but combining multiple things they said.
- For example, "Your teacher didn't have a review session, you couldn't go to office hours, and your TA wasn't helpful. I can see why you're worried even after studying a lot."

Validation

People like to hear that their feelings are valid. Sometimes — particularly if someone is venting about a tough situation — it's not the time to offer solutions or judgments. Rather, they may just need a listening ear or a shoulder to cry on. This is a particular emphasis of an approach to psychology called dialectical behavior therapy.

Pay Attention

- Put your phone down or away to show that you are focused on them.
- If you're scrolling social media while they're talking, it can seem like you don't really care.

Focus on the facts

- Even if you don't totally agree, try to find the kernel of truth in the other person's perspective.
- Only validate the valid: the facts of the situation, and the person's experience, feelings, opinions, or difficulties.
- Not their judgments about the situation.
- For example, "He said that because he doesn't care about my feelings," is not necessarily true. But you could validate that they feel like he doesn't care.
- Show you understand the cause and effect: "Because your roommate is playing video games late at night, you feel disrespected."
- Leave out judgments when validating.

Remember

- College is a new environment, and every person you meet is a potential friend!
- Keep in mind, not everyone you meet will become a friend, and that's okay too. Nobody gets along with everybody.
- If it takes you some time — even the entire year — to find the people you really click with, that doesn't mean there's anything wrong with you. Thousands of other freshmen all over the country are having the same challenge. Some of them may even be on your campus, waiting to bump into you.

What Are Values, and How Are They Different From Goals?

What you'll learn

- The difference between goals and values
- Why it is important to identify your values
- Some strategies to help you figure out your values

What is the difference between a goal and a value?

- Goals are concrete. If you set your goals effectively, they are specific, achievable, and measurable (see *How Can You Set Better Goals and Stick to Them?*).
- Values are more global. They define what is important to you, what you stand for, and how you want to live your life.
- Values determine how you want to act on an ongoing basis. You cannot necessarily “achieve” a value, but you can live your life according to one.

Here are some examples

- If you want to enter a romantic relationship, date for a while, and get married, those are goals.
- If you want to spend your life being loving and loyal, those are values.
- If you want to earn a lot of money, save some for your kids to go to college, and take your family on lots of expensive vacations, those are all goals.
- If you want to be supportive to your family, that's a value.
- If you want to lose 10 pounds, build muscle, and eat healthier foods, those are all goals.
- If you want your life to be full of self-care, that's a value.

- There are countless other potential core values including kindness, integrity, dependability, acceptance, bravery, generosity, joy, gratitude, independence, open-mindedness, resilience, trustworthiness, and authenticity.

Why is it important to identify your values?

- Values are like a compass — they give you direction and keep you on track when you're traveling.
- Just as you'll never get “all the way north” when following a compass, you'll never be done following your values.
- But as long as you're following your values, you'll know you're going in the right direction and can feel great about that.
- Your values can guide your goals and your choices. In the compass metaphor, your goals are like the sights you want to see on your trip.
- Because values are never “achieved,” you can always go back to them.
- For a goal like acing a midterm, you either achieve it or you don't — and either way it's over once you get your grade.
- But pursuing values like working hard or personal growth is ongoing.

How can you identify your values?

Imagine it's your 80th birthday — really picture this in your mind.

- Imagine yourself surrounded by loved ones. Your closest, longest-term friend stands up to give a speech about you.
- Which of your attributes would you want them to talk about? How would you want them to fill in this blank: “the best thing about <name> is, I could always count on them to be _____.”

Think about these different areas of your life: work/education, relationships, play/leisure, and health. In each of those areas, fill in these blanks:

- “In my work/education, I want to behave in ways that are _____.”
- “In my relationships, I want to behave in ways that are _____.”
- “In my play/leisure, I want to behave in ways that are _____.”
- “In regards to my health, I want to behave in ways that are _____.”

Now, think about your “values” and make sure they're yours.

- Growing up, our values are often aligned with or the same as those of our parents.
- For those leaving home and heading off to college, make sure that your values and goals are actually yours — not ones that others expect you to have.
- You want to make sure that you're living the life that you want and achieving what you want to achieve in college.
- Your parents can be a compass for you earlier in life, but you also need to learn to navigate for yourself to feel like a successful adult.

Harris, R. (2019). *ACT made simple: An easy-to-read primer on acceptance and commitment therapy* (2nd ed.). New Harbinger Publications.

Hayes, S. C., Strosahl, K. D., & Wilson, K. G. (1999). *Acceptance and commitment therapy: An experiential approach to behavior change*. Guilford Press.

How Do I Develop Independence, and When Is It Important to Rely on Others?

What you'll learn

- How to define independence in a useful and realistic way
- Why it is sometimes necessary to rely on others
- How to decide when to prioritize independence versus relying on others

What is independence?

- Independence can be understood as the ability to take care of yourself without assistance.
- Being independent also means being able to think for yourself.
- This means meeting your own needs, making your own decisions, solving your own problems, and — as you get older — paying your own bills.
- In western societies, emerging adults are generally eager to achieve independence in all these areas.
- However, it is more helpful — and effective — to think of independence more flexibly.

When to seek help or collaborate

- If you broke your leg, would you try to heal it yourself? If your boss assigned you a project that was meant to be done collaboratively, would you try to complete it yourself?
- In these examples, solving the problems by yourself would be unrealistic and ineffective. In these cases, we can understand independence differently.
- In the broken leg example, independence might mean finding the doctor to treat your broken leg — and, eventually, paying for it yourself.
- In the work project example, independence could mean identifying who to collaborate with, and responsibly completing your own portion of the work.

Peer pressure

- The flip side of independence relates to cultural norms and peer pressure.
- You don't make decisions in a vacuum. You exist in your immediate social groups, your larger communities, and the overarching society you live in.
- How much of your behavior is impacted by those groups?
- Imagine it's Saturday night and your closest friends are all going to a party — but you have a test on Monday and you haven't started studying yet. How easy is it to skip the party?
- What if only one of your friends is going to the party, but three others are staying home to study?
- If you care about college sports, you probably root for your school's teams. If you went to a different school, how likely is it you would still root for the same teams?

Learning to prioritize

- Given all this, how do you decide when to prioritize independence versus leaning on others — or just going with the flow?
- Get in touch with your goals and values (see What Are Values, and How Are They Different From Goals?). How important is it to prioritize them in a given situation?

- Your close friends and loved ones probably take pride in supporting you sometimes (and you may feel the same about supporting them). How will turning down their help impact your relationships with them? Sometimes it may be worth it, and other times, not.
- Think of all the people, history, and variables in a situation. Be fair to yourself and the other people involved. What is the best outcome for you, what is the best outcome for them, and is there a middle path where everyone can win?
- Ask yourself, how much is your ego playing a role in your need to be independent?
- Ask yourself, how much is self-doubt playing a role in your need to rely on others?

Takeaways

- As a general rule, if you often lean one way or the other — overly independent or overly dependent — you would probably benefit from leaning the other way sometimes.
- Life is about balance and flexibility.
- Focus on your own goals, values, and needs in the moment when you need to decide whether to prioritize a party over studying. Your friends' priorities are their own.

For Parents



Child Mind
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What Do **Parents of Students With ADHD or Learning Disorders** Need to Know Before Their Kids Go to College?

What you'll learn

- Potential challenge areas for students with ADHD or a learning disorder as they transition to school
- Ways parents can support their children before and during the transition
- Ways parents can prepare themselves for the challenges as well

The transition from high school to college is among the most challenging transitions for many students, but it's even harder for those with ADHD and learning disorders. And it can be particularly hard for their parents — who may have spent years helping them, shuttling them to appointments, reminding them to take their meds, and advocating on their behalf — to let them go. But you've got this!

It may be bumpy at first

- Keep in mind that your young adult going off to college is still, essentially, a high school student who needs time and space to figure out how to be independent.
- Many students do not perform as well as they — or you — have been used to at first.
- You need to let them figure it out on their own, even if that means making mistakes.
- Parents, teachers, or tutors may have provided significant scaffolding to these students in high school.
- In many ways, adults may have acted as the student's prefrontal cortex. Now they have to do it themselves.

The student will now independently need to:

- Go to bed at a reasonable hour.
- Wake up on time.
- Make it to class.
- Keep track of their assignments.
- Plan a study schedule.
- Make use of unstructured time.
- Take their medication (if applicable).
- Make — at least somewhat — nutritious eating choices.

Before they leave for college, start having them practice doing these things on their own if they aren't already.

Help prepare for this transition early

Teach them life skills and tricks you know for:

- Laundry.
- Cleaning.
- Budgeting and taxes.
- Planning and organization.
- How to change a tire or complete minor household repairs.

Talk to them about their ADHD or learning disorder

- Help them to understand and accept what they need in order to be able to learn effectively.
- If they had a 504 plan or IEP in high school, go over it with them so they can reflect on the supports they had in place.
- They may be reticent to request accommodations from the office of disabilities at college. You can talk about what supports are necessary, and what they can try on their own.
- In the end, they'll need to make their own decisions regarding accommodations and how much they tell their professors about their struggles.
- Give them a heads up about the ways in which college will be different.
- Many smart students with ADHD or a learning disorder might not have needed to study much in high school, or could get by with waiting until the last minute to study.
- Sustained effort is practically a requirement for success in college.
- Your student may find that their regular "approach" is ineffective.
- Their first-ever academic problems may be interpreted as a personal failure, which can lead to frustration, anxiety, and depression.
- They may hide their "mistakes" from you, for fear of facing the truth or disappointing you.
- Emphasize that they can and should be honest with you, and that you understand that they may take some time to find their groove.

Be an anchor for your young adult

- As much as you need to give your child space, it's also important to be there for them.
- Many students are experimenting with independence and life changes, but want home to feel familiar.
- Don't make any big changes at home without first discussing with them.
- Keep them informed of big life events — you may be tempted to hide something like a family illness until they come home, but this can erode trust and increase anxiety.
- Ask them about their life, not their grades.
- Ask questions about what their professor is like, or what they're doing in their free time.
- If you focus on their academic performance, they may start dodging calls or keeping the truth from you.
- Try your hardest to wait until they ask for advice before offering it.

Reflect on your own feelings

- Your children might absorb or mirror how you feel about any challenges they face.
- Your child needs you to be positive about their ability to succeed in college, despite their ADHD or learning disorder, and realistic about what they need to do get there. If you're feeling pessimistic, or feeling guilty about "passing on" those challenges to them, work through those emotions.
- Talk to other parents you trust, talk to a psychologist, or talk to others in a parent group.
- Focus on your child's strengths and provide positive reinforcement and encouragement for their efforts.
- Be a role model by being transparent with them — honesty goes both ways.

How Do You Support a Child Who Is Nervous About Leaving Home?

Start with VALIDATION

If you remember being scared to leave home for the first time, share your story. But even if you have not personally experienced this situation, emphasize that your child is not alone. Many people find this transition hard!

When they share their anxieties with you:

- Pay attention! Put down your phone, make eye contact, and show you are interested.
- Reflect back what you hear. This shows you are listening and want to understand. Avoid a judgmental tone.
- For example, “I hear you saying you’re worried that you’re not going to know anyone in any of your classes, so you’ll feel isolated.”
- Look for what they’re NOT saying. Check their facial expression, tone of voice, and body language. Is there something they’re afraid to say? Say what you think they may be leaving unsaid.
- For example, “I’m wondering if you’re also worried that you’ll miss your friends and family?”
- Put it in context. Why does it make sense that your child is feeling what they’re feeling? What parts of their anxieties are reasonable based on the circumstances?

What you’ll learn

- The importance of validation when your child tells you they’re anxious
- How to tell when they’re ready to problem solve
- Ways to help your child build motivation for problem solving

- For example, “I think it makes sense that you feel this way! You’ve known your friends since elementary school, and you’ve never gone that long without them. You also haven’t had to make new friends since new people joined in 9th grade, so you’re out of practice. I would be anxious too!”
- IMPORANT: When validating, don’t argue the other side yet! Your child may “dig in their heels” or “double down.”

After you’ve validated, look for clues that your child is ready to problem solve

- They may literally ask, “What should I do?” or say, “Help!”
- But it may be more subtle than that. It might be a shift in their mood or body language.

Then, help them build motivation for problem solving!

- Ask questions instead of telling them what you think.
- Your goal is to help them own the solution, NOT to solve the problem for them.
- For example, “Why is it important to make new friends at college?” instead of, “But you know it’s important to make new friends at college!”
- Help them anticipate obstacles and brainstorm potential solutions.

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- For example, “If it’s a big lecture and there are no opportunities for discussion during class, you can get there early and try to meet people in the hallway.”
 - Affirm their strengths without downplaying their worries.
 - For example, “I understand why you’re worried about this. I’m also confident that once you find yourself in those situations, you’ll handle them better than you expect. It’s always scarier before it actually happens.”
 - If you try to help with problem solving and your child goes back to expressing their worries, switch back to validation.
 - Lastly, don’t be afraid to remind them that you’ll always be available to support them. They may just need to hear it.

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Miller, W. R., & Rollnick, S. (2012). *Motivational interviewing: Helping people change*. Guilford Press.

Your Child Is Having a Conflict With Their Roommate. What Should They Do?

What you'll learn

- Strategies for helping your child manage the roommate conflict 1-on-1
- Who your child can seek help from if they cannot solve the problem themselves
- What your child can do if nothing else works

Encourage communication

First, encourage your child to solve the problem by speaking to their roommate themselves! As an example, let's say the roommate is not being quiet at night and it's making it hard for your child to sleep. Help them construct an effective request using dialectical behavior therapy's DEAR MAN skill (from the 2015 DBT manual by Dr. Marsha Linehan):

- **Describe the facts.** "I have early classes most days, so I try to be in bed by midnight so I can wake up by 8. But you're often up past 3am playing video games or laughing at memes on your phone."
- **Express how you feel.** "This leaves me feeling frustrated and annoyed because my grades are important to me, and I don't learn as well when I'm tired."
- **Assert yourself.** "Could you please either start going to bed earlier on weeknights, or else find another place to hang out after midnight, like a common room or a friend's place?"
- **Reinforce what's in it for them.** "If you do, you can stay up as late as you want on Friday and Saturday night."
- **Stay mindful of your goal.** Don't allow yourself to be distracted! If they aren't hearing you, choose a respectful and concise phrase — like "I'd appreciate it if you could keep it down after midnight" — and keep coming back to your assertion like a "broken record."

- **Appear confident.** Stand tall, use a confident tone of voice, and maintain eye contact. Practice ahead of time if you're nervous!
- **Negotiate.** If you can't get all of what you want, try to get some of it instead. Maybe they can have lights off by midnight only on the nights before you have 9am classes.

Help your child write out a script and rehearse it together! Role-play as the roommate and help them prepare responses to possible arguments.

Seek outside help

If this fails, your child may need the help of someone in authority.

Encourage your child to talk to a resident assistant (RA)

- Most dorms have an RA, dorm parent, or some other point person for dorm-related issues. Their job includes helping to manage roommate disputes.
- They will often mediate conflicts and can enforce any official rules the roommate may be violating.

Encourage your child to talk to someone higher up

- If the conversation with their RA does not yield the results they're looking for, your child may need to talk to someone higher up.
- This could be a senior RA, faculty supervisor, the office of housing, or dean of students.

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- If necessary, search your child's school website for terms like "housing," "residential life," and "housing administration."

Help your child request a room transfer.

- If all else fails, most schools have a system for requesting an official room transfer.
- If the problem is bad enough, while they wait for the transfer to come through, see if there is anywhere else they can stay! Friends may be happy to let them sleep on their couch.

Your Child Failed a Midterm. How Can You Support Them, and What Should They Do?

What you'll learn

- First steps to take if you find out your child failed a midterm
- Problem-solving strategies based on whether they can still pass the class
- How to help your child recover if they need to drop the class

Take a deep breath and assess

We know this isn't exactly the news you were hoping to hear. Before you react, just take a moment to slow down. Take some deep belly breaths! Then you'll be able to calmly assess the situation. Admonishing your child won't do anything to change their grade.

- Breathe in so that it fills up your lungs (your belly will expand), then breathe out sloooooowly. This will slow down your autonomic nervous system and help you relax.
- Assess the situation. What's the story? Did they study hard and still fail? Or did they slack off and stop going to class? If the latter, you may want to check in on their mental health.
- How receptive is your child to support right now?
- Is their attitude closer to "I don't want to talk about this, leave me alone" or "Help me, please, I don't know what to do"?
- If you see signs of both, which is the bigger one?

Validate

If they want you leave them alone, lean into VALIDATION and try to get them to open up. Say things like:

- "I know this is hard."
- "It's frustrating to try your best and have things not work out."
- "I can understand if you're worried about the future right now."

- Your goal is to get them to open up, but you're not going to force them to do so!
- Once they're willing to talk, you might be able to progress to problem solving.

Can they still pass the class?

Have them check the syllabus or ask the professor directly to find out how they're doing so far and what it will take to pass the class. Then make a plan.

- Will they need to get 95s or higher on everything they submit the rest of the way?
- If they CAN still pass the class, help them make the necessary plans and changes!
- Are they willing and able to get extra support?
- Their school may have a tutoring center — are they willing to work with a tutor the rest of the term?
- Can they attend their professor's or teaching assistant's office hours?
- Do they have other obligations that would prevent them from doing these things? Work? Childcare? Extracurricular activities?
- Encourage your child to schedule tutoring sessions and commit to going to office hours. Suggest they ask about possible extra credit opportunities.
- Help them set deadlines, like "I will email my professor by Tuesday."
- Ask permission to follow up with them for accountability. If they say yes, do so.

If they CAN'T still pass the class

While failing a midterm isn't always a make-or-break scenario, failing is a possibility. If they've run the numbers and checked with the professor, then you can suggest that they consider dropping it, or switching it to pass/fail.

- Most colleges or universities will still give students the opportunity to drop a class or switch to pass/fail for several weeks after midterms.
- Your child may wind up with a "W" or "incomplete" on their transcript, but this is not always calculated into their GPA.
- Not every class can be switched to pass/fail. If they have questions, they should contact their academic advisor or advisor's office!
- Double check: Are there credit or grade requirements for them to maintain financial aid or scholarships?
- Dropping one class usually will not impact this, but failing the class might!
- Your child can contact their school's financial aid office, or check their financial aid paperwork!
- Many schools require a GPA above 2.0, or require that the student not be on "academic probation" for a certain length of time.

But if they drop the class, won't they be behind on their credits?

- Maybe... but that's okay!
- Did they come in with credits from high school or AP classes?
- If not, they can always overload in a future semester, or take summer classes.
- This may be cheaper than their typical classes anyway!
- Encourage them to consider taking summer courses towards their requirements at a local community college or online.
- Your child should check with their academic advising office to ensure the school will accept the credits!
- Also, fewer than 50% of students graduate from college in four years. You may want to consider a different timeline with your child, if possible.
- At this point, the most important thing is to support your child through their loss, regardless of what feelings this might stir up for you.
- Support without judgment will go a long way in helping them to build the resilience they will need to move forward.

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Miller, W. R., & Rollnick, S. (2012). *Motivational interviewing: Helping people change*. Guilford Press.

How (and How Much) Should You Support Your Child From Afar?

What you'll learn

- How to judge your child's readiness to change
- The difference between "change talk" and "sustain talk"
- How to support them whether their motivation is low or high
- How to avoid pushing them to dig in their heels

Avoid the righting reflex

When kids tell their parents about ineffective behaviors, many caregivers experience the "righting reflex" — the urge to respond with "You have to change that!"

- For example, a child saying, "I've overslept and missed a couple of my classes, so I'm not feeling prepared for my midterm" leads the parent to say, "You have to get to bed earlier. You need to start setting alarms. You should join a study group," etc.
- This is a totally understandable urge, but if you start pushing for change when a person is not ready to change, they usually dig their heels in: "Don't worry about it, I'll be fine!"
- Now that they are in college, they'll need to solve their own problems and make some mistakes along the way.

Are they ready to change?

Before you decide how hard to push someone to change, you must first determine how ready they are to change. If they are coming to you with an issue, do they want solutions — or do they really just need someone to listen for now?

- Your first step is to determine how ready your child is to change! Do you hear more "change talk" or "sustain talk"?
- Change talk: I want to, I can, I have reasons to, I need to, I promise to, I'm ready to, etc.

- Sustain talk: The opposite! I don't want to, I can't, I don't need to, etc.
- If you already hear lots of change talk, great!
- Be careful — don't push your own agenda! Instead try to support your child's agenda.
- What changes do they already want to make, and how can you help them achieve those?

How to help your child be more solution oriented

If you hear lots of sustain talk, your goal should be to help your child identify the problem and build motivation to change it.

Reflect back what they say when they tell you about their problem.

- For example, "It sounds like you're having a hard time making it to your morning classes and you're worried that will affect your grade."
- This will keep them talking about the problem, making it harder to ignore.

Affirm the positive

- For example, "It sounds like it's important to you to do well on your midterm."
- Show that you believe in them based on what they're already doing.

Ask open-ended questions

- For example, “What’s getting in the way of you making it to those classes?”
- Avoid yes/no questions, like “Are you going to bed early enough?”
- Avoid questions that could be perceived as leading them to a specific answer, like “What’s more important to you, partying or your grades?”
- These will often backfire and make your child feel like you’re judging them.

Ask questions that pull for more change talk

- For example, “Why do you care about your grade on the midterm?”
- This will help your child focus on their own reasons for wanting to change, which helps to build their independence.

Don’t ask questions that pull for sustain talk

- For example, “Why do you keep staying up so late?”
- The answer will be an argument in favor of the ineffective behavior!

Miller, W. R., & Rollnick, S. (2012). *Motivational interviewing: Helping people change*. Guilford Press.

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With funding from Oak Foundation, the Child Mind Institute is offering tools and resources about learning disorders, and their intersection with mental health challenges, to help young people succeed in learning and in life. To learn more, go to childmind.org/oakfoundation.

ABOUT THE CHILD MIND INSTITUTE

The Child Mind Institute is dedicated to transforming the lives of children and families struggling with mental health and learning disorders by giving them the help they need to thrive. We are the leading independent nonprofit in children's mental health, providing gold-standard, evidence-based care, delivering educational resources to millions of families each year, training educators in underserved communities, and developing open science initiatives and tomorrow's breakthrough treatments.

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