

# Surviving College 101

## Stress Management

### Workbook



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## **Stress Management 101**

Welcome! This session will review information about common reasons behind college stress and introduce techniques to help manage these stressors. We encourage you to allow yourself to be open-minded and curious, rather than judgmental, when exploring what causes you stress and when implementing changes. Remember that skills are built through practice, so it's important to practice these skills to gain the full benefit. In fact, think of this as an act of **survival** that is essential for you overall health! The more that you apply these skills, the more efficient you will be at recognizing your stressors and your needs and creating an effective practice of managing them that works for you. This workshop will be broken down into two parts: a review of causes of stress in college and then solutions to manage stressors.

### **Part 1: Causes of Stress in College**

- Living away from home for the first time
- Variable Schedule
- Different academic expectations
- Procrastination
- Lack of Motivation
- Difficulty with time management
- Lack of a support network (Covered in Navigating Friendships 101)
- Relationships (Covered in Navigating Friendships 101)

### **Living away from home for the first time**

For many of you this is the first time in your life where you are fully responsible for taking care of yourself. This includes:

- Getting yourself up and ready in the mornings
- Figuring out meals: When, where & what
- Laundry
- Sleep/wake schedule
- Scheduling appointments: Personal, academic, and medical
- Transportation
- Class scheduling

For many this is also a time you are away from loved ones for an extended period which can cause loneliness and lack of support.

### **Variable Schedule**

A typical schedule for college students is different from a high school schedule where you go to school from 7:30am-2:30pm, Monday through Friday. In college you may have classes on Tuesday and Thursday only, during one semester, and are free the rest the week. The next semester, this might change. This variable schedule puts the responsibility on the student to manage their time and schedule effectively, including remembering which classes are which days, what is due for each class and when, and getting yourself to where you need to be when you need to be there.

For example, college requires a lot of out of class work and students need to plan time in their schedules to complete this work. High school may have had homework due the next day, but in college, you may have larger assignments that aren't due for several weeks but that you *should* start working on prior to the day before it's due.

### **Different academic expectations**

Speaking of assignments, in college **you** are responsible for your learning. The professors provide the basic information, but lectures alone may not be enough for you to fully understand the material.

Example: Teachers expect you to complete readings outside of class. Lectures may not cover everything in the readings, but you are expected to know the reading material come exam day.

Grading in college generally looks different than high school. Your final grade may be composed of only a mid-term and final exam. Or other classes may have weekly assignments or quizzes.

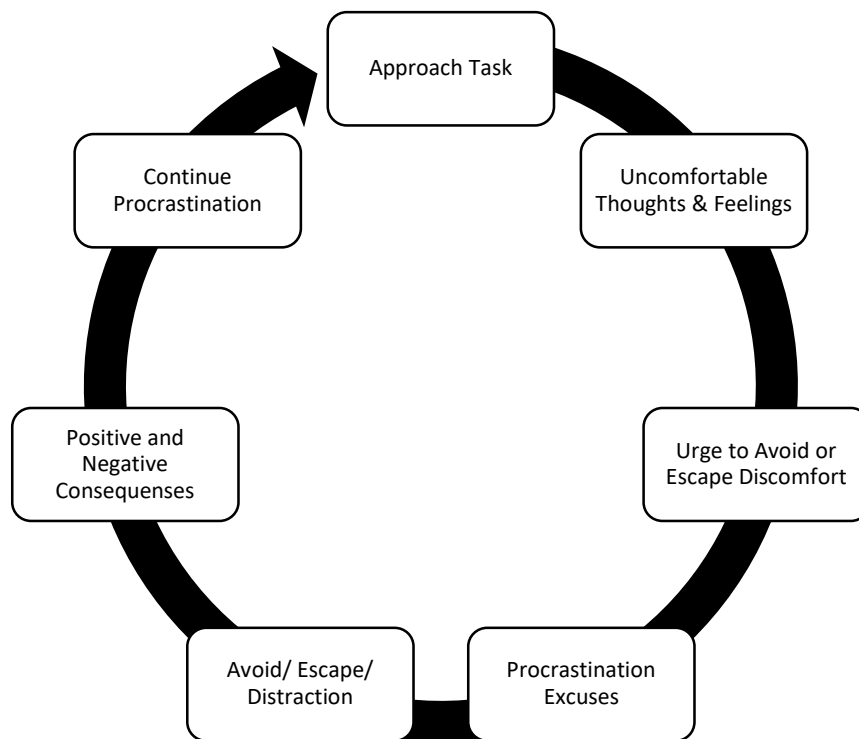
A lot of students also find the material or pace of instruction more challenging than high school. You may not be able to get a passing grade solely by showing up to class and taking the exams without completing work outside of class time.

**If the expectations of college level exams are causing you stress or anxiety, our Test Anxiety session in this series will provide you with tools to help manage and overcome these symptoms.**

### **Procrastination**

Related to the above section, with a more varied schedule and due dates further into the future, procrastination is an issue we often see students struggling with. When we think about procrastination, the word itself may bring up many images and perhaps even unpleasant feelings associated with it. We have all at one time or another pushed our duties off until they could no longer be ignored, and we were left with the choice of not doing the task all together or pulling an all-nighter to get it all done. After the fact, we probably experienced feelings of shame and a resolve to never do it again...only for the cycle to repeat itself once more. Sound familiar? Below you will find a visual representation of the **Procrastination Avoidance Cycle**.

## **Procrastination Cycle**



So, why do we procrastinate? This is a complicated question because there may be many different factors driving this unhealthy habit. We will discuss some of the more common reasons why people procrastinate and help unravel some of the behaviors associated with procrastination. Can you think of why you have procrastinated in the past? Below you will find a list of frequent reasons people procrastinate. Please take a moment to circle those that are common for you. At the bottom will find that there are some blank spaces for you to fill out reasons that are unique to you.

- Obligations feel like a burden
- Vague goals/ values
- Stress
- Anxiety
- Sadness
- Other strong emotions
- Indecisiveness
- Self-critical
- Poor confidence
- Perfectionistic
- Discomfort with the task
- Unfamiliar or unsure about expectations
- Procrastination is rewarding; alleviates acute stress
- Feelings of resentment
- Task is too big, unsure where to start
- Task is boring or unsatisfying
- Self-preservation
- Poor organization
- Tired, exhausted
- Need for a greater sense of urgency before starting task
- Other priorities or commitments
- Spreading self too thin
- Working in the wrong environment
- Easily distracted
- Old habits get in the way
- Poor motivation, lack of desire
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Take a moment to answer the following questions:

1. Why do I procrastinate?
2. What excuses do I make?
3. What activities do I engage in when I am procrastinating

## **Motivation**

One of the most common complaints we hear from students is about limited or complete lack of motivation. For many, this means a complete shut-down of productive behaviors and subsequent feelings of helplessness. For some, it may even affect how they feel about themselves, the world around them, and their future.

Motivation is simply defined as the desire to do something. There are many factors that affect our motivation. But for today, let's focus our attention on **extrinsic** variables, or external rewards, and **intrinsic** variables, or personal drives.

Both extrinsic and intrinsic motivators can have a profound effect on how we view a challenge and the actions that we take thereafter. It is important to remember that we all have individual preferences and values. Therefore, finding the right motivator that works for you may take some trial and error.

## **Common myths and misconceptions**

Oftentimes when approaching a difficult task, we are stuck before we even get started. Let's address some of the common myths and misconceptions about motivation that can impede our progress. Mark any myths that seem relevant to you.

<b>Myth</b>	<b>Reality</b>
<b>I have to be motivated to get started on a task</b>	If you are waiting for the mood to strike, you might find yourself waiting for a long time. Motivation can actually be built by getting started and sticking to committed course of action.
<b>Set-backs cause demotivation.</b>	While it's true that set-backs can be stressful, how we chose to respond to these can make a huge difference on our continued level of motivation.

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**Motivation depends solely on external variables.**

Motivation is affected by our environment, but that's not the whole story. Although it can be stressful and overwhelming to respond to outside stressors (e.g., a demanding professor, numerous deadlines,) the way that you respond to these stressors can also impact motivation. The good news is that you have greater control of your response.

**I need to feel fear to feel motivated.**

Although fear can be a great motivator, sometimes it can also be paralyzing. Using fear as your only mode of motivation can be limiting and exhausting.

**I can just try my best!**

While this may sound like helpful advice, this is simply not enough. It is helpful to be specific about behaviors that you want to address in order to see clear results.

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## **The science of motivation**

To better understand motivation, let's talk about the brain and some of the neuroscience involved.

The main structure in the brain responsible for motivation is the **mesolimbic pathway**, often referred to as the **reward pathway**. Motivation happens when dopamine, a brain chemical, spikes when you **anticipate** a reward.

The cool thing is that your brain can be trained to take advantage of these bursts of dopamine sparked by a rewarding experiences that works for you. That means you can create dopamine spikes by setting up a system of rewards! One way to achieve that is by setting incremental goals, in other words, setting small goals along the way. We will review these strategies in greater detail later in our workshop.



## **Time management**

Now let's move on to time management. When you look at all you have to do as a college student, it may feel overwhelming! Time management involves a few key components including planning, setting goals, prioritizing tasks, monitoring, and revising your plan as needed. When creating your plan, please keep in mind that this may be a new process and you may not always make the most accurate prediction of how long something will actually take. It's important to account time for learning, adapting, and building confidence with each step. In other words, be compassionate with yourself and set realistic, flexible standards.

Effective time management involves creating new behavioral patterns, which we create through **repetition** and **reinforcement**. Essentially, we do things because we get used to them and they feel good. But this may not always be a conscious process. Behaviors are largely influenced by the consequences that follow them.

For example, some people develop the habit of procrastination because, by putting things off, they experience some form of **reward or reinforcement**:

- The deadline may have been extended and they avoided the consequences of their behaviors.
- They got to spend time doing things that they enjoyed instead having to work on this dreaded task, activating the **reward pathway** in their brain.
- Or they were able to pull off completing the task at the last possible moment and were subsequently **praised** for their ability to do so.

These habits are hard to break because they have constantly been reinforced. However, to create new habits, we have to establish... you guessed it... **reinforcement and repetition**. This means finding the **right incentives and practice, practice, practice!**

## **Part 2: Solutions to Manage College Stress**

In this second half the workshop we will discuss solutions to manage these stressors. These include:

- Identifying Supports
- Goal setting
- Scheduling
- System of Rewards

### **Identifying Supports**

By attending this workshop you have already taken the first step in connecting with supports! Great work!

The most important thing is to ask for help as soon as you realize you're struggling. Professors, TA's, tutors, the Student Success Center, Center for Educational Access, Dean of Students, Pat Walker Health Center and CAPS (Counseling and Psychological Services) are just a few examples of campus resources that exist to help students. (See appendix to find out more about where to access these supports). There is no shame in seeking support! That's why these resources are here. If you were the first one to struggle with college, these resources wouldn't exist yet.

In addition to academic support, it's also important to know how to build a social support network. If you live on campus, RA's can help identify social events that can help you build a community on campus. You can also look at the RSOs (registered student organizations) that interest you to identify like-minded others you could connect with. Students join (and create!) RSOs throughout their college career – it is never too early or late to join one. Attend social events that you see advertised on campus or in your residence hall. Talk to peers in your classes.

**The Navigating Friendships 101 workshop will go into building social supports in more detail.**

## **Goal-Setting**

Let's move on to goal-setting. There are a few things to consider when developing your goals. First, **let go of unachievable goals**. Now this doesn't mean that you don't set any standards and simply become complacent. This means that you are thoughtful in creating **realistic** standards that you are capable of investing your time and energy in.

Next, **break down** your goals into **small, incremental steps**. Having small, incremental goals allows you to keep your eye on the prize and builds momentum. Remember those dopamine spikes? Dopamine is released every time you complete a step and meet a challenge as a result of your brain's reinforcement. Also, you are no longer overwhelmed with the immensity of your task and can focus your attention to one thing at a time.

Then, make sure your goals are **measurable and concrete**. It's impossible to assess your progress when you don't know what you're looking for! Lastly, **be flexible** with your expectations. Sometimes we may misjudge the demands and resources it takes to complete a goal. It's okay to readjust!

Remember: create SMART goals:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Attainable
- Relevant
- Time specific

An example of this would be: choosing to read 2 pages for 15 minutes before moving to the next step.

Okay, so before setting your goals, let's get an idea of what you have going on this week.

1. Things I need to do today:

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2. Things I need to do this week:

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Got it? Awesome! Now, when goal-setting, make sure you dedicate some time each day to review your goals and adapt your plan as needed.

**Prioritizing**

Now, creating effective goals is not enough; it is also helpful to prioritize. Here are some questions to think about:

- What is most **important** to me right now?
- What needs immediate attention? What's **urgent**?
- What goals do I need to complete before I can move on to other tasks?
- Are there any items on my to-do list that can wait until tomorrow?

Now that you thought about this question, you can create a category system for yourself that reflect your priorities using the worksheet below.

Time period \_\_\_\_\_

	<b>URGENT</b>	<b>NOT URGENT</b>
<b>IMPORTANT</b>	DO IMMEDIATELY _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	DECIDE: PLAN OR SCHEDULE _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
<b>NOT IMPORTANT</b>	DELEGATE IF POSSIBLE _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	DUMP _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

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### **Setting up a System of Rewards**

While goal-setting is important, we can get so bogged down with setting goals that we forget about rewards. It is crucial to develop a balance that will help you sustain your efforts and work. This balance should include self-care, leisure, and a system of rewards you can look forward to.

“Guilt-free play” is essential in renewing your motivation, creativity, and energy. In order to be productive, you have to balance your time—this means prioritizing recreation, relaxation, and self-care, as it important to your overall mental and physical health. We are more likely to be productive when we can anticipate pleasure and success rather than stress. This means having immediate, definite, and tangible rewards that break up the monotony of

work. In fact, to increase motivation, you must make the periods of work shorter (and less excruciating) and integrate these with more frequent and immediate rewards. This **might seem counterintuitive** to you, and that's understandable.

Let's look at this concept another way: this is an example of **quality vs. quantity** use of your time. When you have spent hours staring at the same problem, two things can happen. First, you start to feel fatigued and are unable to maintain the same caliber of work. In fact, you find that your work suffers. Second, your motivation decreases. Feelings of frustration and anxiety may begin to set in and cause you to feel overwhelmed. By giving yourself frequent breaks, you can ensure that your **efficiency** is maintained, and your work does not suffer.

## Scheduling System of Rewards

Today	This Week
<b>Tasks</b>	
Group Presentation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Outline</li> <li>○ Power point slides</li> <li>○ Personal notes</li> <li>○ Revisions</li> </ul>	Study for 3 Finals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Create Study Guide</li> <li>○ Set up study groups</li> <li>○ Microbiology (personal deadline Wednesday)</li> <li>○ Biology (personal deadline Friday)</li> <li>○ Organic Chemistry (personal deadline next Tuesday)</li> </ul>
Biology Readings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Pages 56-60</li> <li>○ Pages 60-65</li> <li>○ Pages 65-69</li> </ul>	Essay <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Research</li> <li>○ Outline</li> <li>○ Intro</li> <li>○ Body</li> <li>○ Conclusion</li> <li>○ Revisions</li> <li>○ References</li> </ul>
Meet with Professor	
<b>Rewards</b>	
15-30 minute break	Dinner with friends
Go for walk	Trip to the beach
Catch up with a friend via text	Buy yourself a treat
Play a game	
Take a soothing bath	
Watch an episode of your favorite television show	

*\*Daily rewards are scattered intermittently between task components; Weekly rewards are applied at end of week once most goals are met*

# My Self-Care Plan

Rewards

Activities that are fun:

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Activities that are relaxing:

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Other incentives:

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Today	This Week
<b>Tasks</b>	
<b>Rewards</b>	

*\*Daily rewards are scattered intermittently between task components; Weekly rewards are applied at end of week once most goals are met*



## **Wrap-Up**

So that concludes our session! Thank you for taking time to be present for yourself and focus on your well-being. Remember the transition to college can be stressful. Be kind with yourself through this learning process. Keep in mind that **you are not in this alone** and you can enlist support from others. Again, there is no shame in asking for help or support, you are not the first one to struggle with managing stress!

# APPENDICES

## Supplemental Materials

## Self-Care/ Leisure Activities

Acting	Amusing people	Attending a concert	Beachcombing	Being alone	Being with animals	Being at the beach
Being complimented	Being coached	Being counseled	Being in the country	Being at a family get-together	Being at a fraternity/ sorority	Being with friends
Being with happy people	Being in the mountains	Being with my roommate	Being with someone I love	Being told I am loved	Being with my parents	Bird-watching
Boating/ canoeing	Budgeting my time	Buying things for myself	Buying something for someone	Camping	Caring for plants	Canning/ Making preserves
Cheering for something	Collecting things	Combing/ brushing my hair	Completing a difficult task	Complimenting or praising someone	Cooking	Counseling someone
Dancing	Dating someone I like	Designing/ Drafting	Discussing my favorite hobby	Doing art work	Doing experiments	Doing favors for people I like
Doing housework	Dreaming at night	Driving long distances	Eating good meals	Exploring/ Hiking	Expressing love to someone	Feeling the presence of a Higher Power
Fishing	Fixing machines	Gardening/ Doing yardwork	Gathering natural objects	Giving gifts	Giving a party for someone	Getting up early
Getting massages	Giving massages	Going to an amusement park/ zoo	Going to a barber/ beautician	Going to a concert	Going to lectures	Going to a luncheon/ potluck
Going to a health club/ sauna/spa	Going to the movies	Going to a museum	Going on nature walks/ field trips	Going to a play	Going to a restaurant	Going to a reunion
Going to a spiritual/ peaceful place	Going to a sports event	Having coffee/tea with friends	Having daydreams	Having friends over to visit	Having a lively talk	Having lunch with friends
Having an original idea	Having spare time	Hearing jokes	Helping someone	Hiking	Horseback riding	Improving my health
Kicking sand/ pebbles/leaves	Kissing	Knitting/ crocheting	Laughing	Learning something new	Listening to the radio	Listening to music
Looking at the stars/ moon	Making charitable donations	Making food to give away	Making a new friend	Meditating/ Doing yoga	Planning or organizing something	Playing sports
Playing cards	Playing music	Playing with a pet	Playing in nature	Playing a board game/ chess	Photography	Repairing things
Reading	Reminiscing	Riding in a plane	Running/ jogging	Saying prayers	Seeing beautiful scenery	Seeing old friends
Sewing	Shaving	Singing	Sleeping late	Smelling a flower or plant	Seeing good things happen to people	Solving a puzzle/ crossword
Speaking a foreign language	Staying up late	Smiling at people	Taking a bath	Using my strengths	Watching TV	Writing in a journal

## Weekly Schedule (for planning or tracking)

Time	Monday Date:	Tuesday Date:	Wed Date:	Thursday Date:	Friday Date:	Saturday Date:	Sunday Date:
6-6:59am							
7-7:59am							
8-8:59am							
9-9:59am							
10-10:59am							
11-11:59am							
Noon							
1-1:59pm							
2-2:59pm							
3-3:59pm							
4-4:59pm							
5-5:59pm							
6-6:59pm							
7-7:59pm							
8-8:59pm							
9-9:59pm							
10-10:59pm							
11-11:59pm							

## Scheduling System of Rewards

Today	This Week
<b>Tasks</b>	
<b>Rewards</b>	

Time period \_\_\_\_\_

	<b>URGENT</b>	<b>NOT URGENT</b>
<b>IMPORTANT</b>	DO IMMEDIATELY _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	DECIDE: PLAN OR SCHEDULE _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
<b>NOT IMPORTANT</b>	DELEGATE IF POSSIBLE _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	DUMP _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

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## University of Arkansas Support Resources

<b>Dean of Students Office</b> 325 Administration Building 479-575-5004 <a href="https://studentaffairs.uark.edu/">https://studentaffairs.uark.edu/</a>	<b>Center for Educational Access</b> Arkansas Union Room 209 479-575-3104 <a href="https://cea.uark.edu/">https://cea.uark.edu/</a>	<b>The CORD: Student Success Center</b> 470 N Campus Drive 479-575-3174 <a href="mailto:success@uark.edu">success@uark.edu</a>
<b>Pat Walker Health Center Primary Care Clinic</b> 525 N Garland Ave. 479-575-4451	<b>Pat Walker Health Center GYN (Women's) Clinic</b> 525 N Garland Ave. 479-575-4451	<b>Pat Walker Health Center: Counseling &amp; Psychological Services (CAPS)</b> 525 N Garland Ave. 479-575-5276