



Student life & mental wellbeing

A workbook & guide

An introduction



Starting at university, whether it's your first time or you're a returner, is a new and exciting chapter in your life. You may be moving to a new city, taking on new responsibilities or navigating new social environments and these changes can feel overwhelming.

Adapting to new living circumstances can be both thrilling and daunting. You might be moving out of your family home and possibly managing your money independently for the first time. You may also be wondering how to adjust to leaving your family and old friends and how to meet new friends.

All of these transitions can impact your sense of stability, so it's important to establish new routines that support your mental health. This workbook is designed to help you navigate this important time and support your mental health by providing practical strategies, reflective exercises, and resources to help you manage these changes effectively.



How are you feeling about getting started?

Take some time to think and write about what excites you and what you are nervous about. Use the space below to make some notes about your feelings.

Making friends and connections in a new place

Moving to a new place can be an exciting adventure, but it can also bring with it feelings of loneliness. During this time, you might feel isolated, especially if you're in an unfamiliar setting with people who do not know you yet.

The first step to tackling these feelings of loneliness is to acknowledge that they are a normal and natural part of the adjustment process. Everyone experiences loneliness at some point, and recognising it is the first step towards addressing it. You can use this section to explore ways to cope with these feelings and how to take proactive steps to build connections.

Stay connected with loved ones

Regularly check in with family and old friends through calls, texts, or video chats. While you are building new connections, maintaining these relationships can provide comfort and a sense of continuity.

Get involved

Engage in activities that interest you. Get involved with your student union through attending events, joining clubs, or volunteering. These settings provide opportunities to meet people with similar interests, making it easier to form new friendships.

Take the first step

Sometimes, reaching out to others can feel intimidating, but most people are open to making new friends. Remember, a lot of people will be feeling the same way that you are. Start with small gestures like initiating a conversation after class or inviting a classmate to grab coffee.

Reflective journaling

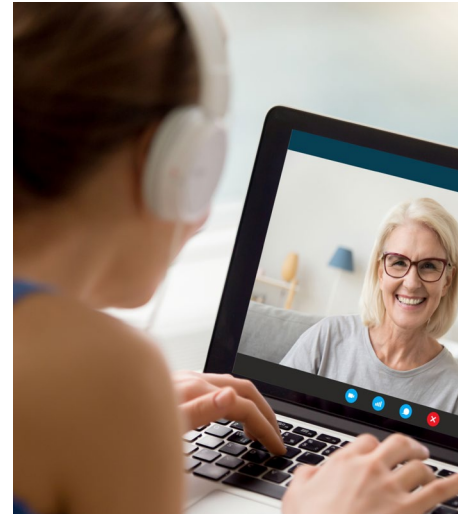
Write about your feelings of loneliness and any challenges you've encountered. Reflect on how you've handled similar situations in the past and what you might do differently now.

Connection goal setting

Set small, achievable goals for making new connections. For example, aim to have one new conversation each day or attend one social event per week. Track your progress and reflect on how these experiences impact your feelings of loneliness.

Seek support

If feelings of loneliness persist, consider reaching out to a counsellor or support group. Most universities have dedicated teams or support groups, and they will be accustomed to helping students settle in. They can also offer guidance and strategies tailored to your situation.





Are you worried about meeting new friends?

Take a moment to write down how you are feeling and think about what might help you navigate this.



Coping with procrastination and exam stress

Procrastination is a common challenge for students, especially when facing the pressure of exams. It is easy to get caught in a cycle of delaying tasks, which only increases your stress as deadlines approach. This section will help you understand why you procrastinate, how to break the cycle of procrastination, and how to manage exam stress effectively.

Procrastination has the power to delay our progress but we can learn how to overcome it using tried and tested techniques to keep motivated and engaged.

Understanding procrastination

Procrastination often stems from a variety of factors, such as fear of failure, feeling overwhelmed, or a lack of motivation. Recognising the reasons behind your procrastination is the first step toward overcoming it.

Worksheet: Identifying your procrastination patterns

Use this worksheet to track when, how, and why you procrastinate. By pinpointing these patterns, you can develop targeted strategies to overcome procrastination.

Time of day	Task or activity	What did you do instead	How did you feel	Why did you procrastinate?

Reflection

Think about these questions and write down some of your thoughts.

What patterns do you notice in your procrastination habits?

Are there specific tasks or times of day when you are more likely to procrastinate? Write down your observations

What feelings or thoughts are usually present when you procrastinate?



Strategies to counteract procrastination

Once you have identified your procrastination patterns, you can begin implementing strategies to break the cycle. Here are some techniques to help you stay on track.

Break tasks into smaller steps

Large tasks can feel overwhelming, leading to procrastination. Break them down into manageable steps and focus on completing one step at a time.

Set clear, achievable goals

Instead of vague goals like 'study more', set measurable goals such as 'review two chapters of notes in the next hour'. This will give structure to your task making it easier to work through.

Use the Pomodoro technique

Work for 25 minutes, then take a five minute break. Repeat this cycle four times, then take a longer break. This method can help maintain focus and prevent burnout while you are completing your task.

Eliminate distractions

Identify what distracts you most. Do you scroll through social media often or watch TV in the background? Take steps to minimise these distractions while working, for example, if you find that you are tempted to scroll or look at your phone, leave your phone in a different room and if you watch TV in the background, turn it off.

Reward yourself

Set up small rewards for completing tasks, such as a short walk, a favourite snack, or time to relax. This can create positive reinforcement for staying on task.

Exam stress management

Exam stress is a natural response to the pressures of academic performance, but it can be managed effectively with the right strategies. Use the following tips to keep stress at a manageable level:

Start early

Begin studying well in advance of your exams to avoid last-minute cramming, which increases stress and anxiety.

Create a study schedule

Plan out your study sessions, ensuring you cover all of the necessary material while giving yourself time for breaks and relaxation.

Practise relaxation techniques

Deep breathing, mindfulness, and light exercise can help reduce anxiety and keep you calm during study sessions and exams.

Maintain a healthy lifestyle

Ensure you are getting enough sleep, eating well, and staying physically active. A healthy body supports a healthy mind!



Making a plan to try different strategies for counteracting procrastination will enable you to find out what works best for you and will help you stay on track.

Planning your time effectively

Use this planner to organise your time, break down tasks, and manage your exam preparation. This structured approach can help you stay focused, reduce stress, and help you achieve your academic goals. Remember to add in rest and breaks into your plan as this will help you to sustain your plan.

Day	Task	Time	Break task into steps	Reward
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				
Sunday				

Reflection

<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	Did breaking tasks into steps make them feel more manageable?
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	Were the rewards effective in motivating you to complete tasks?
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	How did sticking to this plan impact your stress levels?

Procrastination and exam stress are challenges that many students face, but with awareness and the right tools you can overcome them. Building better habits, staying organised, and managing your time effectively is the key to staying on track during these stressful periods. Remember, small steps lead to big progress and by taking control of your study habits you are setting yourself up for success!



Prioritising your wellbeing

As a student, it is easy to get caught up in the demands of your studies, social activities, and other responsibilities. Prioritising your wellbeing is essential for maintaining a healthy balance as a university student. When you prioritise your wellbeing, you will be better equipped to handle stress, stay focused, and maintain positive relationships. This is the key to keeping a healthy body and mind! Ignoring your health can lead to burnout as well as decreased academic performance and negative impacts on your overall happiness.

Looking after your wellbeing is vital for academic success. It enables you to manage the ups and downs of student life, build and maintain connections and keep on track with your studies.

Key areas of wellbeing

Sleep

Adequate sleep is crucial for cognitive function, emotional regulation, and your overall health. Aim for 7-9 hours of quality sleep each night when you can.

Nutrition

Eating a balanced diet fuels your body and mind. Prioritise eating healthily and getting proper hydration when you can. This might mean choosing to cook a healthy meal at home rather than relying on takeaways.

Social connections

Maintaining social relationships provides emotional support and reduces feelings of loneliness. Whether you keep in touch with old friends or make an effort to meet your new ones, these relationships will support your mental wellbeing.

Stress management

Finding healthy ways to cope with stress, such as relaxation techniques or talking with friends helps to prevent things from becoming overwhelming. It is also really important to give yourself enough time to complete important tasks.

Exercise

Regular physical activity improves mood, reduces anxiety, and boosts overall physical health. Activities like joining your university's gym or one of the many sports clubs on campus can help motivate you.

Managing negative thoughts

Monitoring your thoughts and challenging negative thinking patterns can help maintain a positive mindset and improve mental health. It can also serve as a way to cope with negative thoughts by remembering areas in your life that you feel are positive.



Sleep is vital for keeping your body and mind healthy.

Mental health wellness tracker

You can use this Mental Health Wellness Tracker tool to help you monitor and reflect on different aspects of your wellbeing. It will help you to identify negative patterns and celebrate the progress you make.

At the end of your day, take a few minutes to fill out the tracker and rate how you felt about different areas of your life. Then, at the end of the week, review your ratings and think about which categories you consistently rate lower. Ask yourself what might be causing this and use this information to make adjustments for the following week. At the end of the month, you can take a moment to reflect on areas you could improve but also areas where you navigated a lower score and made adjustments to improve your wellbeing the following week.

The Wellness tracker

Day	Sleep	Nutrition	Social	Stress	Exercise	Positive thoughts	Negative thoughts	Notes/reflections
Monday	/5	/5	/5	/5	/5	/5	/5	/5
Tuesday	/5	/5	/5	/5	/5	/5	/5	/5
Wednesday	/5	/5	/5	/5	/5	/5	/5	/5
Thursday	/5	/5	/5	/5	/5	/5	/5	/5
Friday	/5	/5	/5	/5	/5	/5	/5	/5
Saturday	/5	/5	/5	/5	/5	/5	/5	/5
Sunday	/5	/5	/5	/5	/5	/5	/5	/5

Wellness tracker scale

If you need some assistance to differentiate the levels on the scale, use the chart below to find the number which corresponds with how you are feeling and add the number to the tracker above.

1 - Not good	Feelings of unhappiness, stress or overwhelm.	Red	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I'm really tired or sick. I feel very anxious or upset. I don't want to do anything.
2 - Needs help	Things not going well but trying and making an effort	Orange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I'm feeling tired or unmotivated. I'm worried or stressed about a few things. I need help to feel better.
3 - Okay	Not good, not bad. Manageable, could be better.	Yellow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not feeling happy or sad, just okay. I can get through the day, but I don't feel great. Things could be better, but I'm fine.
4 - Good	Feeling good, satisfied.	Green	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I feel calm and positive. I'm able to focus and do things I enjoy. I'm not stressed, and I feel comfortable.
5 - Great	Feeling happy, proud. Things are great.	Blue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I feel really good and energised. I'm excited about what I'm doing. Everything feels easy and enjoyable.

Managing self-criticism and academic excellence

Striving for academic excellence often comes with high expectations, both from ourselves and from others. While it is natural to want to do well, this drive can also sometimes lead to self-criticism, especially when things do not go as you planned. Learning to manage self-criticism and approach setbacks with compassion is important for maintaining a healthy mindset and achieving your goals in a sustainable way.

Understanding self-criticism

Self-criticism involves negative and often harsh thoughts about yourself, especially when you feel you have fallen short of your goals. It might sound like, “I’m not good enough,” “I’ll never succeed,” or “I’m a failure.” While self-evaluation can motivate improvement, excessive self-criticism can be damaging and lead to anxiety, decreased motivation, and even burnout.

It is important to recognise when self-criticism is becoming harmful and to learn to replace these thoughts with more compassionate ones. This not only helps maintain your mental health but also supports long-term academic success.

Dealing with failure

Failure is a part of learning and growth. But it can also feel devastating, especially when you’re striving for excellence. How you respond to failure can significantly impact your future performance and wellbeing. Instead of letting failure fuel self-criticism, use it as an opportunity for reflection and growth.

Steps to dealing with failure

Acknowledge your feelings

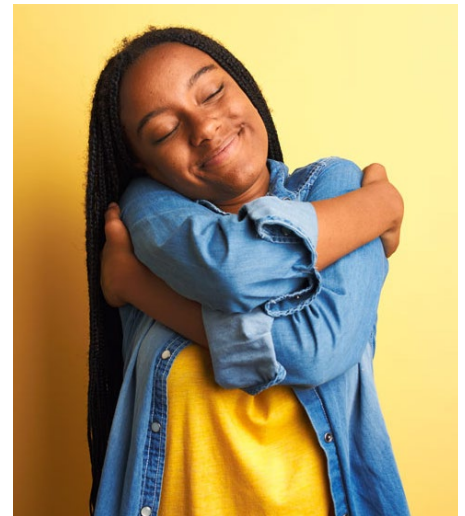
It is okay to feel disappointed, frustrated, or upset. Allow yourself to experience these emotions without judgement.

Reflect constructively

Rather than focusing on what went wrong, consider what you can learn from the experience. Ask yourself questions like, “What can I do differently next time?” or “What strengths can I build on?” This will allow you to think about failure as an opportunity for future success.

Separate identity from performance

Remember that your worth is not tied to your achievements. A setback does not define you; it is just one part of your journey.



Seek support

Talk to a mentor, friend, or counsellor about your experience. Universities also have academic support teams, who will help you identify where you might improve for the next assignment. Sometimes, an outside perspective can also help you see things more clearly.

Transforming self-critical thoughts

One of the most effective ways to manage self-criticism is to practise self-compassion. This means treating yourself with the same kindness and understanding that you would offer a friend or family member in a similar situation.

Steps to practising self-compassion

Identify the self-critical thought

Start by noticing when you are being self-critical. Write down the exact thought or statement that you are telling yourself.

Challenge the thought

Consider whether this thought is fair or accurate. Ask yourself if you would say the same thing to a friend in your situation.

Replace with compassionate thinking

Write down a more compassionate, supportive thought. Imagine what a kind mentor or friend might say to you instead. For example, you might have written down something like “I’m so stupid because I don’t understand this”. Instead, you might think to yourself, “It is ok to find things difficult. I can ask for help and give it another go”.

Visualise compassion

Picture yourself surrounded by a supportive presence. This could be a comforting figure like a family member or simply a feeling of warmth and kindness. Let this imagery help soften your self-criticism.

Use a diary to manage self-critical thinking

Use the diary sheet on the next page to document your self-critical thoughts and practise transforming them into compassionate ones. Over time, this process can help shift your mindset towards one that is more supportive and empowering.

Diary to manage self-critical thinking

Date	Situation	Self-critical thought	Compassionate thought	Compassionate imagery	Reflection

Reflection

What patterns do you notice in your self-critical thinking?

How does practising compassionate thinking affect your mood and motivation?

How has compassionate imagery helped you shift your mindset?

Final thoughts

University is often a wonderful experience and is an opportunity to develop new skills, make friends for life, and challenge your academic ability. Trying to balance all of this change can be overwhelming. Making sure you keep track of your stress levels, self-criticism, and negative wellbeing patterns is therefore crucial.

The techniques in this workbook should help you to navigate university life. Practising self-compassion throughout your university experience will allow you to sustain your expectations and mitigate burnout, but remember, seeking help when you need it is also really important. Avoid struggling in silence.

Further reading

If you would like to read more about procrastination or self-compassion, check out our other booklets:

- Understanding how to be self-compassionate - a workbook & guide
- Understanding and beating procrastination - a workbook & guide
- The stress factor – your guide to stress

You can find all of our booklets at www.firstpsychology.co.uk/booklets

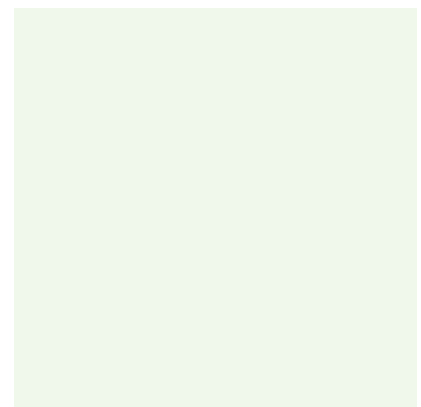
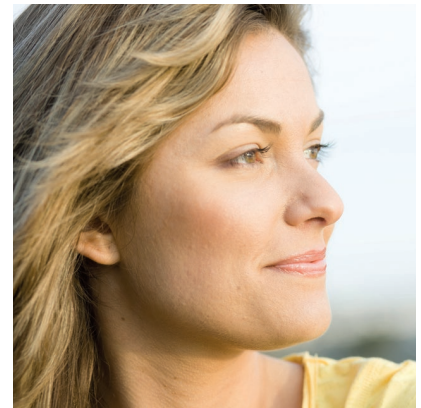
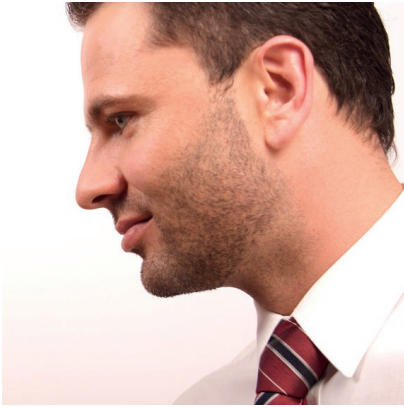


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