



COUNSELLING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES BULLETIN

MAY | ISSUE 1

//

There is no doubt that COVID-19 has changed the way we live, communicate and work. Our role as psychologists includes working every day to improve people's lives and at Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS) we are supporting our student community through online therapy. While transitioning to online therapy can be a big adjustment it can be a worthwhile support particularly in a time of crisis.

Dr. Tahira Haider

Head of Department |
Counselling &
Psychological Services

Adjunct Faculty,
Mushtaq Ahmed Gurmani
School of Humanities and
Social Sciences

Five tips for preparing for online therapy during the COVID-19 break

By Dr. Tahira Haider



Online therapy can be a powerful tool particularly during times such as the ones we are experiencing presently, so my advice is vocalise what you need and expect, and be willing to meet your therapist half way as we do this work together.

Carve out a safe space and intentional time for therapy.

Reduce distractions, have some space and set time aside as therapy can be rigorous and difficult at times.

Expect some awkwardness at first. It is going to be a different experience from face to face; however, the awkwardness does not mean online therapy is not working for you. Your ability to adapt might surprise you if you keep an open line of communication with your therapist.

Be flexible with the format of your therapy. Zoom has a combination of audio and video as well as messaging, options. It is worth exploring what combination

of options works for you based on your personal circumstances and internet connection.

In the absence of bodily cues, practice naming your emotions more explicitly. Therapy done in person allows your therapist to observe your bodily cues and facial expressions to better understand your emotional state. Learning to be more descriptive around your emotions can give therapists useful information, for example instead of saying "I'm tired" another way is "I'm drained/burnt out".

Don't be afraid to give your therapist feedback. Online therapy is a recent development and as clinicians we are trying our best to translate our in-person work to a digital platform. Therefore, feedback is critical in helping us figure out what is working and what isn't.

Look after yourselves and stay safe!

Turbulent cohabitation: Dealing with familial interpersonal problems

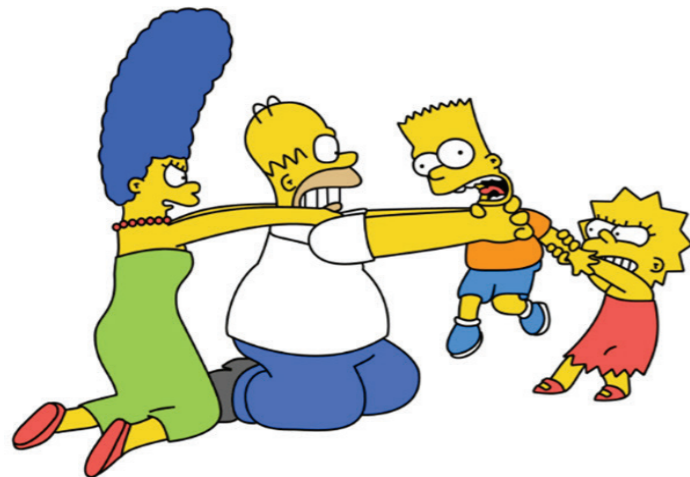
By Adam Kureshi

Recent times have brought us a bit too-close to our families and a 24/7 availability is a sure recipe for disaster with increasing tensions amongst members including nagging, criticism, and unwarranted arguments.

Working from home can be difficult for the family to adjust to. A respectful discourse regarding study, work and leisure time is recommended while assertively declaring this time as not a 'vacation' just because you are homebound might bring the family on same page. Schedules and

talking that privacy/boundaries are recommended – this will ensure the psychological well-being of the entire family.

Quality time and activities that the whole family can indulge in may strengthen bonds. These include joint fitness routines, board games, music, or reading books. Doing something nice for your family or taking charge for household chores can alleviate the burden of responsibility from a family members and give him/her a sense of responsible family cohesion.



At times you might need to excuse yourself from unnecessary conflicts. However, if unavoidable, use humour to defuse tensions. Breathing, mindfulness and distraction (counting back from 100, add sevens or rigorous exercise) may also help pacify intense emotions. Where a discussion is warranted, talk about your feelings without blame or labels; keep arguments constructive and focus on a single-issue at a time.

It will help to talk to peers/friends often and anticipate stressful situations. Practice reactions in case an actual situation arises. Understand and be mindful of not only your own but your family's feelings and behaviours, including physical signs such as headaches, shortness, palpitations, trembling etc. Write coping statements and place them where you can see them. Avoid catastrophising and jumping to conclusions, and substitute negative thoughts with more balanced and positive statements.

Trying is the key word here and there are no solid guarantees but these troubled times require optimism. Finally, remember to be kind and considerate as Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh once said:

"The seed of suffering in you may be strong, but don't wait until you have no more suffering before allowing yourself to be happy".

I'm too tired to be productive!

By Anushay Khan

The entire day, one seems to be extremely "busy", yet towards the end, does not seem to have done anything "productive". Sounds familiar?

So what is productivity?

'Productivity' usually connotes feelings of "efficiency" (i.e. a need to constantly be busy whether in your head or with your hands!), often leading to emotional or physical exhaustion or "burnout". You're tired!

To counteract this problem, Chris Bailey coined a new definition for 'productivity' (Bailey, 2018):

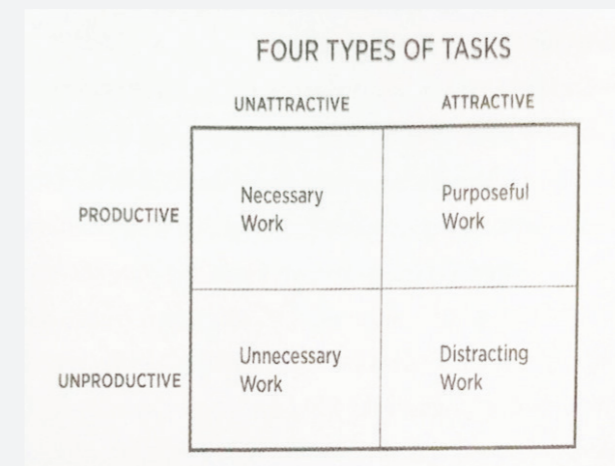
"Productivity means accomplishing what we intend to do".

For example, if we intend to write down a 2,000-word essay and start work on a new project and successfully manage to complete these tasks, we are productive! Similarly, if we also intend to spend a relaxing day doing absolutely nothing, we are also productive!

Following this distinction saves us from anxiety, frustration and P.R.O.C.R.A.S.T.I.N.A.T.I.O.N.

Therefore, productivity is about doing the "right thing" in each moment set out by earlier intention.

So how can we manage our tasks to improve productivity? Here is a guide to help you divide tasks into categories (Bailey, 2018):



Necessary Work: Includes tasks that are unattractive, yet productive. (e.g. studying, completing assignments etc.- in most cases!)

Unnecessary Work: Includes tasks that are both unproductive and unattractive. (e.g. renaming files on your computer or rearranging your workspace 5 times!)

Distracting Work: Usually includes highly stimulating, unproductive tasks (e.g. binge-watching a Netflix series).

Purposeful Work: These tasks have been described as those each of us has been "put on this earth to do"; things that highlight our strengths and increases our energies, things we are passionate about!

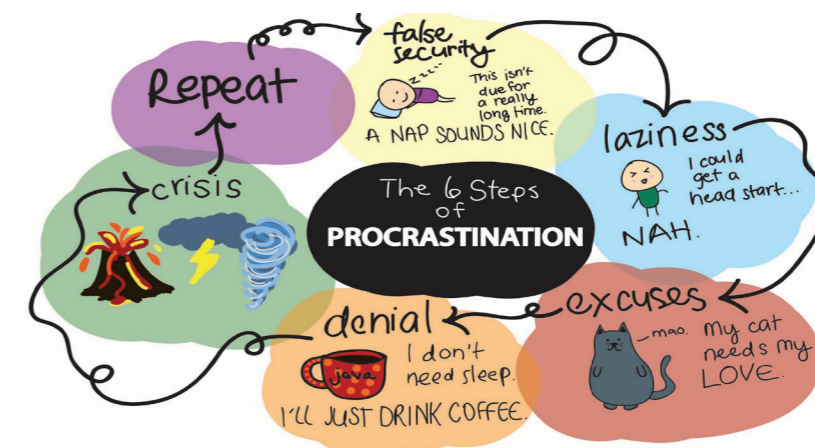
So what is YOUR purposeful work?

Bringing it Together:

- Set an intentions list for yourself every day.
- Divide up your daily tasks on your intention schedule based on the four categories provided above. You'll see where your attention is being used – and for how long!
- Focus more on your 'necessary' and 'purposeful' work. The remaining two categories will sort themselves out!
- Giving yourself time to sit, observe and breathe should also be put on the 'intentions list!' (under purposeful work!)

Being focused and organised can beat your stress & anxiety

By Maria M. Ayub



way we feel, think and behave. Thinking about the tasks we need to perform can be overwhelming. As a result, we tend to make emotionally driven decisions and actions. Some might find it hard to concentrate and focus whereas others might quit or postpone the task, resulting in procrastination, which fuels more tension. With the technique mentioned below, break the cycle of tension and be more efficient, focused and attentive.

5-4-3-2-1 Technique

When your mind is bouncing around between various worrisome thoughts, taking a conscious notice of your surroundings by using your 5 senses which can help you come back to the present moment.

Pay closer attention to your breathing. Once in sync with your breath, ease your mind by:

Are you stuck under the pile of work? Do you have a lot of deadlines ahead but cannot figure how to do it? Are you feeling stressed, anxious and overwhelmed about it?

As a student you may feel that you are always rushing and there is

not enough time to get everything done. All the responsibilities of university, home, work, friends, and family can be.

Being stressed does not affect your brain only but it can create a whole bodily response and creates an alteration in the

- Acknowledging **5** things you can **see** around you
- Acknowledging **4** things you can **touch** around you
- Acknowledging **3** things you can **hear** around you
- Acknowledging **2** things you can **smell** around you
- Acknowledging **1** thing you can **taste** around you



Look for the small details, small patterns on things. Feel the texture and temperature. Pay close attention to the sounds outside your body, number of birds chirping around. Focus on some tangible things that can help you regain the control.

Prioritisation is key to help reduce stress and anxiety

- **Make a list.** When overwhelmed, the mind tricks

us and we feel everything is going out of hand. Making a list helps your mind go to assessment mode where it subconsciously sorts out what's important.

- **Now or later.** After making a list, sort those tasks based on the urgency. Use Figure 1 for categorisation.
- **One thing at a time.** Be aware of your mind telling you that "Everything is Important". Don't multitask; you'll get exhausted quickly. Work on one task at a



time.

- **Set a time limit.** Set a realistic time limit. Break the bigger task into smaller achievable chunks.
- **Be Flexible.** Go easy on yourself and be flexible. Don't let unexpected distractions be a source of your frustration and irritation. Calm yourself down again by using 5-4-3-2-1 technique.
- **Get back in action.** Rather than let a setback prevent you from progressing with your list, re-prioritise and move onto another item.



A recommended app that helps you deal with specific conditions related to Mental Health is ACT Coach

making up for the sleep during the weekends is an example of poor sleep hygiene. Whereas, maintaining a regular sleep cycle throughout the week is an example of good sleep hygiene. Healthy sleep is critical for physical, emotional and mental wellbeing.

Signs of poor sleep hygiene

Difficulty falling asleep at night, frequently waking up in the night, waking up with the feeling of restlessness most of the times and feeling tired throughout the day.

How you can take care of your sleep hygiene and sleep well?

Following are the most important things that require your attention while you go to bed.

- Temperature of the room should be neither too cold, nor too hot.
- Say no to caffeine or other substance intake at night.
- Don't eat right before going to bed, a gap of at least 2 hours is recommended.
- Keep the lights of your room dim.

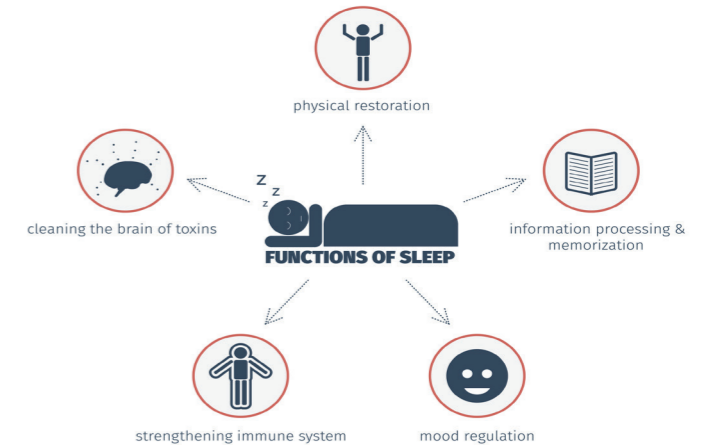
- Avoid use of cell phone and laptop while in bed. If using, make sure the brightness of your gadget is low.
- Follow the same bed time routine every day.
- Don't do other work in your bed during the day time.
- Limit nap times during the day.
- Exercise is essential; make it a routine during the day.
- If you can't sleep start doing some activity such as reading

- but in soft light.
- Don't stress if you can't sleep.
- Meditation and relaxation exercise can help before going to bed.

Recommended APP for Maintaining Sleep hygiene- CBT-i Coach

CBT-i Coach is a mobile app for people who have experienced symptoms of insomnia and would like to improve their sleep habits.

WHY IS SLEEP IMPORTANT?



Sleep hygiene

By Maha Nadeem

During this COVID-19 break, the importance of sleep among us is going under the radar. Disrupted sleep cycles have a relationship with the mental functioning of the person; hence maintaining sleep hygiene is very important during this break even when you have to

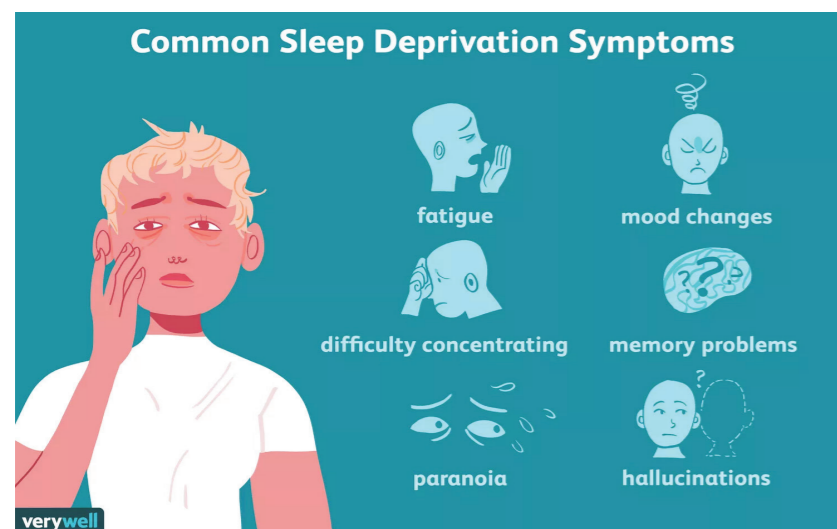
be at home all the time.

What is sleep hygiene?

Sleep hygiene is term used for a person's bedtime rituals and activities associated with the night time. Staying up all night and

Daily sleep requirements, with respect to age

LIFE STAGE	DAILY SLEEP NEEDS
NEWBORNS (0-3 MONTHS)	14-17 hours
INFANTS (4-11 MONTHS)	12-15 hours
TODDLERS (1-2 YEARS)	11-14 hours
PRESCHOOLERS (3-5 YEARS)	10-13 hours
SCHOOL AGE (6-13 YEARS)	9-11 hours
TEENAGERS (14-17 YEARS)	8-10 hours
YOUNGER ADULTS (18-25)	7-9 hours
ADULTS (26-64)	7-9 hours
OLDER ADULTS (65+)	7-8 hours



Study tips for the online space

By Nida Zafar

If you have been having trouble getting back to studying in an online space here are some tips that might help:

A good study space

Set up in a room with good lighting, a desk and a comfortable chair; if not, any surface where you can comfortably sit with your laptop as well as take notes is fine. Ensure the room has a good Internet connection as well as a power outlet. Then collect all your books and and have your required stationary nearby so that you don't have to constantly run around later.

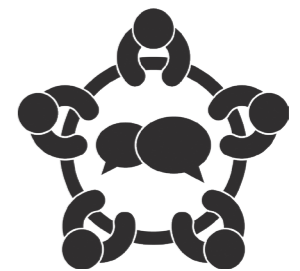
Set a goal and make a study plan

The first step is to re-evaluate your semester goal to avoid unrealistic pressure. Based on the goal, set up an achievable study plan, and stick to it 90% of the times, allowing room for flexibility. Be organised and know your deadlines so you can plan for them ahead of time. Make a list of tasks that need to be accomplished each day, remember a list with too many tasks is setting you up for failure.

Time burglars

During study periods tell friends and family that you aren't available

for the next few hours. Sign off on all your social media apps and keep your phone in a separate place or on silent mode when studying.



Develop a study team

Create a study team of a few friends or class fellows online.

This space allows you to remain motivated as well as bounce off your ideas, clarify confusions and blow off steam with people with similar experiences.

- **Take breaks**

Take short breaks to stretch your

body, and rejuvenate your mind in between study periods

Lastly, be kind to yourself

Many of us are entering uncharted territory and so the process might be a little overwhelming. Remember you are

trying your best to learn to adapt to a new style of learning and it might take you time to adapt. Also it is essential to appreciate and treat ourselves when we do well.

Self-help programmes and resources



thedesk is developed by the University of Queensland, Australia for tertiary students to achieve mental and physical health and well-being. thedesk has free online modules, tools, quizzes, and advice that can help people improve well-being and study more effectively. There are four modules that aim to assist students stay calm, be more productive, and improve their wellbeing and relationships.



Ecouch is a free self-help interactive which provides evidence-based information to understand emotional problems better, and learn strategies that may help improve your life. It draws from cognitive, behavioural, and interpersonal therapies, as well as relaxation and physical activity. There are modules for depression, generalised anxiety and worry, social anxiety, relationship breakdown, and loss and grief.



Smiling Mind is a free mindfulness meditation app developed by psychologists and educators to help people balance their lives by looking after their mental health, and manage the pressure, stress, and challenges of daily life.



MoodMission is a free app designed to empower you to overcome low moods and anxiety by discovering new and better ways of coping. When you tell MoodMission how you're feeling, it will give you a tailored list of 5 Missions (evidence-based activities and mental health strategies) that can help you feel better.



ReachOut Breathe is a free app that helps you reduce the physical symptoms of stress and anxiety by slowing down your heart rate.



ReachOut WorryTime is a free app that gives you a place to store your worries until later, so you don't get caught up in them and can get on with your day. WorryTime will alert you when it's time to think about them. Instead of listening to negative thoughts or pushing them away, research shows that postponing worries and only giving them attention at a set time helps you manage worry.



The Check-In is a free app developed by Beyond Blue for anyone who wants to check in with a friend whom you are worried or concerned about. It guides you through four steps on how you could plan a conversation, and gives you advice on next steps.

References

Breus, M.J. (2016). Eating at night disrupts sleep. *Huffpost*. Retrieved from: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/eating-at-night-disrupts-sleep_b_7867760

SleepFoundation.org. (2020). Healthy sleep tips. Retrieved from: <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/articles/healthy-sleep-tips>

Zakri, J. (2020). Sleep hygiene. *Tuck*. Retrieved from: <https://www.tuck.com/sleep-hygiene/>

Sehgal, S. (2020). 5 Ways To Not End Up Hating The People You're Quarantined With. Retrieved From: <https://thehutterfly.com/lifestyle/5-ways-to-not-end-up-hating-the-people-youre-quarantined-with/>

Meerza, S. (2020). It's Only Been 2 Days Of Working From Home And My Parents And I Are Off To A Very Bad Start. *Go Corona, Corona Go, Please*. Retrieved From: <https://thehutterfly.com/lifestyle/its-only-been-2-days-of-working-from-home-and-my-parents-and-i-are-off-to-a-very-bad-start-corona-corona-go-please/>