

## **MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES**

- There are some issues that are frequently encountered by students. Managing your mood, getting a good night's sleep, and knowing when you need to reach out for support are all important aspects of mental health. Below are some helpful tips that address some of the challenges that students face.

### **1. Help with depression.**

- More than just sadness, depression is a persistent low mood that can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems if left untreated.
- Everyone occasionally feels blue or sad. For most, these feelings are usually short-lived and pass within a couple of days. If your down feelings have an impact on your day-to-day functioning, you may be depressed. Left untreated, depression can worsen, sometimes leading to thoughts of hurting oneself or even suicide.

Depression is a common but serious illness. Still, there are a few things you can do to help alleviate symptoms and create a foundation for treatment:

- **Eat a Balanced Diet:** Food nourishes our body and our brain. When we eat healthfully, we feel more energetic and balanced. We can think more clearly and better cope with daily stresses.
- **Sleep Well:** Try to get 7-8 hours of sleep each night to give your body time to replenish itself. Going to bed and waking up around the same time each day can help your body better regulate itself. When we are well rested, we have more physical and emotional energy to cope with the day ahead.
- **Seek Support and Connection with Others:** Communication is key. When we don't feel well, it's not uncommon to isolate ourselves and assume others are either not interested or have too much on their own plates to listen to us. Many students feel that everyone else is doing great in their classes and having lots of fun, while they alone are struggling. But this is almost never accurate. Talk to friends, teachers, counselors, family—maybe even someone who feels the same way. Being heard and understood is important. You will feel less alone and less isolated.
- **Exercise:** Try to be active for at least 30 minutes every day. This could mean just walking to class instead of cycling or playing catch with a friend. Any movement helps. Exercise releases endorphins, which make us feel better about ourselves, giving us a self-esteem boost.
- **Get Involved:** Being part of a group, club, or team, whether on campus or off, can give you a sense of belonging. With numerous ways to get involved, there is something out there for everyone. Move toward things that interest you and bring you pleasure. You can meet people, have fun, and be active.

### **2. Help with Anxiety:**

- Anxiety is a normal physiological process, protecting us from real and imagined threats. When alerted, our bodies respond with anything from vague discomfort to a pounding heartbeat.
- When your body is alerted and does not begin calming, or when you can't calm enough to focus on work or sleep, you need tools to cope. When there is no acute

threat, your body is almost always responding to concerns about the past or future, and things that feel out of your control.

- If you are feeling anxious, focusing on the present and the things you do have control over can be helpful. Try the following techniques.
  - Grounding Exercise: Sit comfortably and upright with your feet firmly on the floor. Gently press your feet into the floor, noticing your legs tighten a little and then relax. Let your shoulders relax. Pay attention to how the ground and your seat are supporting you.
  - “5, 4, 3, 2, 1”: Think of 5 things you can see, 4 things you can hear, 3 things you can touch (and touch them), 2 things you can smell or like the smell of, and take 1 slow, deep breath.
  - Calm Breathing: Imagine you have a straw in your mouth and make a small opening to breathe through. Breathe slowly through your mouth and imagine the air is being drawn down to your belly button. Slowly breathe out. Repeat 6 times. As this becomes easier, pay attention only to your breath. If possible, schedule a time to practice this each day.
  - Planning: Often, just having a plan helps lower distress. Write down what actions you can take to address a specific problem. Identify which actions are feasible and when you can do them. Decide when you will do these.
  - Distracting: Make a list of 3-10 things you can do to take your mind off what is upsetting you. Do at least one of these. (Drinking and drug use should not be on this list!) You can take a walk, listen to music, or watch your favorite movie.
  - Reaching out: Call a friend, family member, counselor—any supportive person you trust—just to talk.
- If you are prone to anxiety, it is important to attend to your self-care. Before seeking medication to cope with anxiety, ask yourself the following: Am I sleep deprived? Is my diet okay? Am I getting any exercise? Am I overusing substances, including caffeine? Do I need a medical evaluation?

### 3. Help for getting better sleep.

- It seems like it should be simple enough to get a good night’s sleep, but you are not alone if you sometimes have difficulty getting enough rest.
- Good “sleep hygiene” is an underappreciated factor in managing mood, stress, energy, concentration, appetite, and overall functioning. Consider the following tips and links to improve this very important part of your life.
  - i. Try to go to bed and get up at the same times every day—even on the weekends.
  - ii. Avoid napping, even if you are tired. If you must, keep naps to less than 30 minutes.
  - iii. Develop a “sleep ritual” before bedtime: a series of steps you take to get yourself ready for bed. Shut down blue screens (your brain thinks the sun is coming up) and decrease activity 30-45 minutes before you want to go to sleep. Some apps such as TikTok allow you to limit your screen time so you’ll be less tempted to stay up late scrolling. Take some deep breaths to help yourself relax.

- iv. Don't stay in bed trying to sleep if you find yourself tossing and turning. If you are unable to fall asleep after 20-30 minutes in bed, get up and engage in some relaxing activity (such as reading a book, sitting in a comfortable chair, having a cup of herbal tea, etc.), then get back into bed when you are sleepy. Repeat as often as necessary.
- v. Use deep relaxation techniques to relax your body and mind. Try progressively tensing and then relaxing each muscle group, from your toes to your scalp.
- vi. Reduce caffeine intake as much as possible. Remember to check your drink labels if you're not sure about caffeine content. Consider consuming no caffeine after noon.
- vii. Avoid heavy meals and alcohol before bedtime, as they interfere with normal sleep patterns.
- viii. Being physically tired is the best path to good sleep. Try to get some aerobic exercise during the day. Walking counts!
- ix. Eliminate non-sleep and non-sex activities from your bed, to strengthen the conditioned association between bed and sleeping. Reading relaxing materials in bed can be okay.
- x. Your bedroom should be quiet and relaxing.

#### 4. Help for managing stress.

- Stress is your body's way of protecting itself against danger—real or imaginary. While not all stress is bad, even normal stressors can at times tip us over into feeling overwhelmed.
- Making plans to manage stress is smart and beneficial to you and those around you. Try these approaches and see what works best for you.
  - i. First things first:
    - i. Try to get 8 hours of sleep each night, hopefully at the same hours, even on weekends.
    - ii. Exercise or find some movement you enjoy that allows you to release tension.
    - iii. Limit caffeine intake.
    - iv. Make well-balanced nutrition choices. Avoid skipping meals.
    - v. Avoid alcohol as an attempt to relieve stress.
  - ii. Learn basic stress reduction techniques.
    - vi. Pay attention to and reflect on your negative self-talk. It can become toxic. Can you think of other messages for yourself?
    - vii. Try a relaxation breathing exercise: Sit or stand with good posture. Breathe through your nose. Inhale, filling first the lower part of your lungs, then the middle part, then the upper part. Hold your breath for a few seconds. Exhale slowly. Relax your abdomen and chest.
  - iii. Time management is key
    - viii. Identify and block off a time and place so you can work with less distractions.
    - ix. Practice saying "no" to situations and people that add stress to your life.
  - iv. Remember to socialize
    - x. Laugh—watch something funny or do a fun activity.

xi. Share what's going on with others in your life—you're not alone!

5. Adjusting to University Life and coping with Homesickness.

- Adjusting and settling in to anything new can be scary. Even good changes can make us nervous. For many students, especially in their first year at KDU, being away from home for an extended period of time may be an unusual experience.
- Early on, it's not unusual for students to feel a sense of loneliness, sadness, confusion, and preoccupation with thoughts about home. Homesickness can feel similar to grief, as one becomes separated from family, close friends, and familiar places. Your usual supports may not be close by to help you adjust to this unfamiliar environment, but knowing some tips for adjusting can be helpful in navigating this period.
- Getting started: While you work on getting into your new routine, feeling like you are on an emotional roller coaster is common and to be expected. It's important to take good care of yourself. Remember to:
  - i. Get plenty of sleep
  - ii. Eat well
  - iii. Get some exercise
  - iv. Avoid abusing alcohol and drugs
  - v. Develop a schedule and identify places and times of day for you to study, and relax
- Homesickness: It's okay to feel sad and homesick—but it's also okay to learn to enjoy your new life even though some family and friends are absent. Here are a few things to try:
  - i. Think of the new experience as the beginning of your adult life—this can be liberating and energizing!
  - ii. Practice focusing a little less on your home—don't text or call family and friends from home all through the day. Schedule specific times to talk with family so that the rest of your time can be spent focusing on your life here at the University.
  - iii. Don't rush into any major decisions straight away about returning home or staying here.
  - iv. Think about other times when you may have been away from home and what helped you get those occasions.
  - v. Write down all the positive things about being away from home, like having more freedom.
  - vi. Remind yourself of all the reasons why you chose to study at KDU.
  - vii. Try not to keep looking back, but forward to the new experiences ahead
- Connecting: You may be worried about making new friends or fitting in. When you look around, it may seem that everyone else is confident and socially connected. The reality is that many people are having similar struggles. A few things to keep in mind:
  - i. Try to just be yourself and relax.
  - ii. Don't expect meaningful relationships to develop overnight. Trust and intimacy in university friendships, like newer relationships in your life, take time.
  - iii. It's unrealistic to expect that roommates will be best friends. Roommates may work out mutually satisfying living arrangements, but the reality is that each may tend to have his or her own circle of friends.

- iv. Reach out to others in your dorm. You are probably not the only one who feels upset. Older students may also be eager to share their experiences with you.
- v. For your first few weeks here, challenge yourself to talk to someone new each day.
- vi. Seek out resources on campus that can help you address problems and get academic or personal support. These resources may even connect you with other resources.
- vii. Explore the many KDU, events, sports, and other activities that are available.

#### 6. Tips for managing grief and loss

- There is no “right way” to grieve: everyone responds to grief differently. Sadness, numbness, anger, and disbelief are just some of the feelings that are part of grieving. It’s important to remember that grief is an individual process and that grief takes time.
  - i. Allow Yourself Time to Grieve: Some students use academic and work obligations as a means of distraction from the painful feelings of loss. While there are times that these feelings need to be temporarily put aside as a means of day-to-day functioning, it’s important to also allow time for grieving.
  - ii. Take Care of Yourself: The grieving process can be stressful both physically and mentally, so it’s important to focus on self-care when dealing with feelings of loss. Try to find an activity you enjoy and set aside a time to do it; journaling, exercising, taking a walk, or watching a funny movie are just a few examples.
  - iii. Memorializing a Loved One: Think of ways that you can celebrate the memory of your loved one. Make a collage or a scrapbook, write a poem or a story, or volunteer for a charity that was important to them.
  - iv. Seek Spiritual Support: Some students find it helpful to reach out to places of worship after the loss of a loved one.
  - v. Remember to Breathe: When feelings of grief and loss become overwhelming, it can be helpful to try a simple breathing exercise. Sit in a chair with both feet on the floor and your hands in your lap. Inhale through your nose for a count of five, filling your lungs with air like a balloon. Hold your breath for a few seconds and then exhale through your mouth, again for a count of five. Repeat 3-5 times as needed.
  - vi. Don’t Go it Alone: It’s important to share your feelings of grief and loss with a trusted family members and friends. You may want to consider seeing a mental health provider if you are feeling stuck in your grief or it is impacting your daily functioning.

#### 7. Help for Attention and Focus Issues.

- Sometimes, maintaining focus can be a struggle. Distractions are everywhere in today’s world. Whether it’s the noise of a suitemate or the nagging of our own thoughts, it can be hard to settle our minds on the work before us. But there are things we can each do to help.
  - i. Sleep Well

- Try to get 8 hours of sleep each night, ideally at the same hours, even on weekends.
  - Develop a relaxation routine for each night before bed: no screens, dimmed lighting, maybe a guided meditation app.
  - Avoid caffeine 4-6 hours before bedtime.
- ii. Exercise Regularly
- Moving your body every day can really help. Scheduling regular exercise several times a week is even better!
  - Yoga or meditation can also help reduce stress and improve concentration.
- iii. Avoid Substances
- Alcohol may seem helpful to de-stress but it can impair your sleep and interfere with your cognition, judgment and memory.
  - Marijuana has been associated with poor performance in school. It impairs attention, motivation, memory formation and processing speed – and these effects can be seen more than a month after use. Young adults who use marijuana every day can actually lower their IQ.
  - And don't reach for your roommate's stimulant or that 6th Red Bull, either. Too much of a stimulant (or a medication that isn't prescribed to you) can cause dangerous heart issues or lead to psychiatric symptoms like mania or psychosis.
- iv. Decrease Distractions
- Stay engaged! Take notes during classes, raise your hand, participate.
  - Create your own personal study space and try to turn off social media.
  - Consider the best times for you to study, e.g., earlier in the day, or at night.
  - Use apps, like Forest or Rescue Time to help you stay on track.
- v. Increase Accountability
- Identify people who can help you stay on task.
  - Organize a regular study group.
  - Go to office hours.
- vi. Stay Organized
- Make a weekly and monthly planner and keep them visible.
  - Mark down important dates and deadlines.
  - Break down long term or big tasks into smaller chunks.
  - Create a to-do list and prioritize.
  - Plan for study breaks throughout the day, the week and the semester.
- vii. Address Wasting Time
- Recognize patterns of time wasting, e.g., watching videos, browsing social media.
  - Be kind to yourself and acknowledge your need to de-stress.
  - Try some self-care activities instead, e.g., going for a short walk, taking a shower, listening to some music, or coloring.

viii. Seek Help

- Sometimes, even despite the above tools, problems with chronic inattention continue to get in the way. If this is the case, get in touch with a provider at Behavioral Medicine, and we can help explore the problem.