



Happy December Everyone! Year's last month, neither an end nor a beginning but a continuation with all the experience, wisdom, and memories from the lessons learnt and opportunities gained! It is a simple wish that brings spectacular moments through our thoughts to life. It is the month of the year that offers time and space to reflect on the year that is gone and on the year that is to come - all through a clear and simple lens. Most of all, it brings silence and endurance we need for a fresh start in our life. All of us worked very hard throughout the semester under our respective circumstances. While most of us were preparing for final exams, some of us were also working extra hours to compensate for the holiday season. To my surprise, a lot of us were juggling both of the things together! Aren't we incredible for keep going through everything? Of course, YES!



Considering the overwhelming changes 2022 has brought in our lives, feeling relieved, happy, relaxed but also, confused, anxious, homesick, and conflicted at the same time is very normal and accepted. We may feel different things at different times but what connects us is what we choose to do with that feeling. Do we acknowledge it and embrace it, or do we dismiss it and avoid it? At Active Minds, we acknowledge that stress instills a different response in everyone and considering the varying situations we are in, we have compiled some possible resources and self-care tips that may help students to destress at these moments.



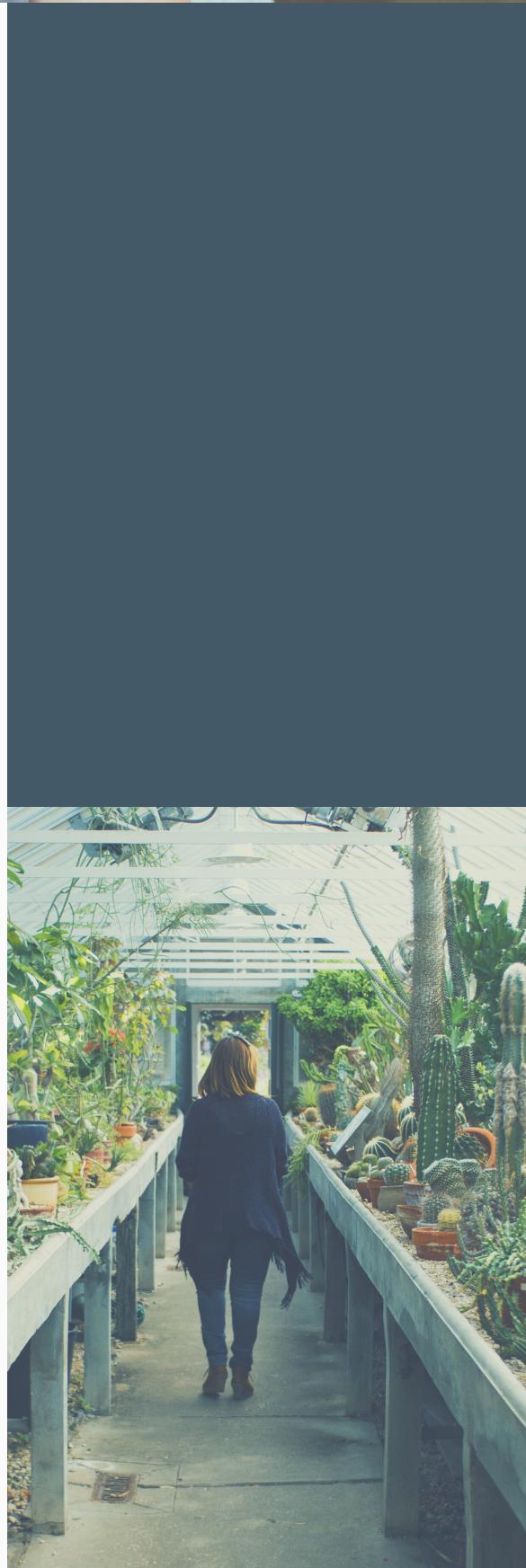
- **Organizational Tools:**

Using tools such as a planner can be helpful if you are someone who likes writing all your tasks and commitments in one place and then making a priority list. Checking off every task as it gets done gives you a realization of coming closer to completing your goals and enhances confidence in your skills. Grouping similar tasks together and keeping set times for checking emails, text messages, helps to make more doable and time-saving lists. If this technique works for you then you know what your time management style is (Bond & Feather, 1988)



- **Following a daily schedule:**

While this seems like something everybody knows, many of us do not actually ponder on the reason behind it which is why this is vital in good time management. Having a routine, a set daily schedule essentially means having set habits of proceeding with your day and doing things that eventually become your behaviors. Incorporating healthy habits in your schedule channelizes your energy in productive tasks and keeps your mind and body aware of what to expect, thus saving more time and contributing to more activities [Bond & Feather (1988); Britton & Glynn (1989)]



- **A Self Compassionate Attitude:**

Self-compassion is a Buddhist philosophy teaching that has gained popularity in Western societies (Neff, 2003a). Self-compassion is defined as the ability to respond to difficult situations with unconditional kindness, acceptance, and a nonjudgmental attitude. This is especially useful for students who place a high value on their academic performance. By viewing failures as a natural part of the human experience, self-compassion fosters a sense of shared connectedness with others. There are numerous self-compassion practices available at <https://self-compassion.org/>. Furthermore, research has shown that self-compassion exercises reduce stress and improve well-being (Neff & Germer, 2013).

- **Set Deadlines:**

Setting time limits and deadlines on tasks helps us to reduce procrastination and the urge to multitask. Francesco Cirillo's Pomodoro Technique can help you break your tasks, reduce mental strain, take accountability, maintain motivation, and finish the tasks in time. The idea of this technique is to break your tasks into highly focused chunks separated by short breaks ensuring you are working on one task at a time. It involves setting a timer for 25 minutes and taking a 5-minute break after. After finishing four 25-minute work chunks or pomodori, take a 20–30-minute break. This will help you to relax, refresh and repeat this cycle if needed without feeling exhausted [5 Reasons to Use the Pomodoro Technique at Work (2019); Neff (2003a)]



- **Regular Exercise:**

Exercise does not always have to be physically demanding. A moderate amount of physical activity could easily help to reduce stress. Short walks, jogs, or any other type of physical activity that you enjoy. Another way to keep yourself entertained while exercising is to pair your exercise routine with music, audiobooks, or shows. The key is to be consistent!

- **Get a good night sleep:**

Get at least 6-8 hours of sleep daily helps you to recover after a long night of exam studying sessions. Many students seemed to sacrifice sleep in order to get more studying time, however, this can be detrimental instead since lack of sleep can drain your cognitive resources and impede your learning acquisition of materials (Curcio et al., 2006). Therefore, try to get enough sleep as much as you can be very important during these exams period.

- **Limit Distractions:** This involves keeping the things away that tempt you the most. This can include your phone, maybe an exciting book that you were planning to read, closing off the multiple tabs on your laptop, reading/scrolling through the news every hour, and sometimes even resisting to pet your cute cat and/or dog. If you are someone like me who recalls so many important things right when you sit to study, it can be remembering your friend's birthday, taking out the laundry from the dryer, paying the phone bill and so many others, it is always helpful to put those things on a piece of paper right away and attend to those tasks when you take your break. When you do take a break, allow yourself to finish those tasks and get back to your main task at hand with a fresh mind with full concentration. Limiting distractions helps us take control of our own time and train our brains to remain focused on the main task at hand (Bond & Feather, 1988; Macan et al., 1990)

- **Organising Workspace:**

Keeping your workspace tidy and equipped with the things that help you stay motivated and those that you require while working reduces disruptions and heightens focus. Tidiness around your surroundings aids in keeping your mind free of chaos and full of organized thoughts. Additionally, little sources of motivation can keep you attentive for longer durations. It can be something as simple as a couple of posters, quotes, check sheets, or something more concrete. For example, many people appreciate the idea of writing their last name with the initials or title of their dream career and sticking it right where they sit on their study table. Seeing what they are working for keeps them motivated, steady, and observant of their time consumption (Britton & Glynn, 1989; Macan et al., 1990).

With 2023 around the corner, Active Minds would like to encourage you to take a moment and appreciate yourself. Tell yourself how amazing you are and how incredible you have been throughout the year for keep going through all the situations and setbacks. Try complimenting a friend, a loved one and even a stranger – believe it or not, it would not just make them feel acknowledged and great about themselves but also make you feel wonderful. When we spread joy, the joy comes radiating back to us! Here's a more technical approach to understand the importance of appreciating all the little things we do.

SELF-REINFORCEMENT OVER SELF-CRITICISM



Have you ever found yourself thinking, "Why do I always make the same mistake? Why cannot I get this right?" and making comments such as, "How dumb of me! I am such an idiot!". Don't worry, you're not alone! Many of us have been there and chastised ourselves for the roadblocks we've encountered or the areas where we might use a little more help. This little negative interaction that we have with ourselves is called Self-Criticism. According to Blatt and Zuroff (1992), self-critical individuals "engage in constant and harsh self-scrutiny and evaluation and have a chronic fear of being disapproved and criticized, and of losing the approval and acceptance of significant others". People with this personality feature strive for perfection and overachievement in order to persuade themselves and others that they are worthy of their acceptance.

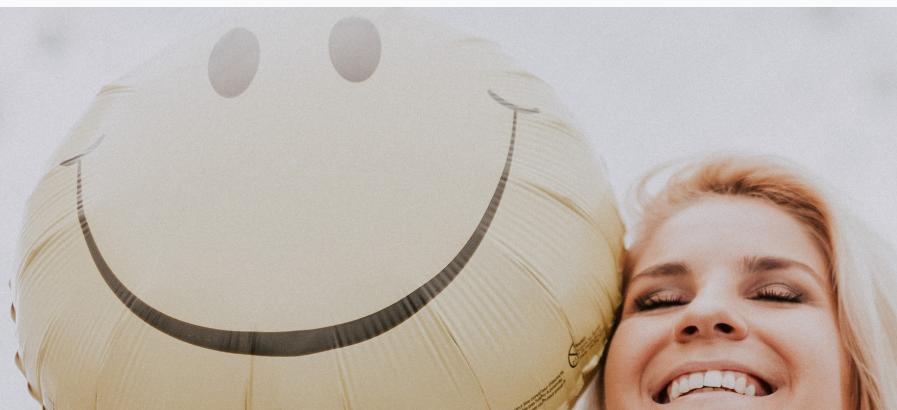
Self-compassion, on the other hand, has been shown by McKay and Fanning (1992) to be a promising protective factor for persons who suffer from extreme types of negative self-evaluation and is thought to be the remedy to self-criticism by some. According to research, people who are more self-compassionate have a happier and more hopeful attitude on life's obstacles (Neff et al, 2007).



Rather than reacting angrily and punitively to themselves in the face of adversity, some people accept their flaws and do not allow them to get the best of them (Leary et al. 2007). Self-compassion is a psychological quality that can assist self-critical people to deal with life's problems (Neff, 2003a, 2003b). Self-compassion's protective features may help people become more resilient in the face of hardship because a self-compassionate person is more likely to recognise their flaws and limitations and react kindly.

Subsequently, self-reinforcement is a great strategy to reward a positive behavior to increase the likelihood of it happening again in the future. It can be anything such as a nice, brewed cup of coffee, an ice cream, going for a hike, watching your favourite show, or for some, a couple of extra hours of sleep. Reinforcing an aspect of the behavior shifts our focus to seeing the positive side of things and concentrating on the progress made rather than on the failures. Pep talks with oneself boost self-esteem, improves mood and well-being, and contributes to enhancing the efficiency of doing tasks. For example, I reward myself by praising myself in front of the mirror and journaling or listening to some music whenever I study for a continuous period of time and resist my temptation to check my phone over and over again.

Whether it is university-related, personal, or work-related stressors, always stay kind to yourself, take care of your mental health, practice self-compassion, and use these strategies to create new success stories! Share your stories with us through Instagram @uofm_activeminds or by sending us an email at activemindsumanitoba@gmail.com.



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