



MANAGING MENTAL HEALTH IN UNIVERSITY

MENTORSHIP GUIDE



**Open
Doors**

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MANAGING MENTAL
HEALTH IN
UNIVERSITY

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COMMON STRESSORS AMONG STUDENTS

Have you ever felt like your **mood** was determined by the **weather**?

- Longterm gloomy and dark weather has reportedly been linked to lower levels of self - empowerment when it comes to students and their studies.
- Seasonal depression is another very common reason for any person (not just students!) to be less motivated during the colder seasons.

Have you ever been stressed out and **not been able to determine why** it is that you're stressed?

- Stressors within students are commonly associated with their upbringings and home life. Many students report being stressed out by finances because they grew up in less fortunate households. Other common stressors include: parental pressure, homesickness and health concerns.

Change is often scary... not only for the brain but for the body as well.

- Not only are students hitting their most significant developmental stages when they enter university, they are also commonly in a brand new environment that their bodies are unfamiliar with, especially if students are adjusting to another culture and country.



Major Topics in Mental Health:

HEALTHY EATING

In 2014, researchers Walid El Ansari, Hamed Adetunji, and Reza Oskrochi conducted a study investigating connections between nutritional behaviour and reported stress and depressive symptoms. Here's what they found:

'Unhealthy' vs 'Healthy' Foods

Researchers found that more frequent consumption of foods perceived as unhealthy (e.g. cookies, sweets, fast food and other snacks) were associated with increased depressive symptoms (e.g. trouble sleeping, lack of energy, loss of appetite, etc.). Increased consumption of 'healthy' foods (e.g. fruits, salads, cooked veggies) were seen to have the opposite effect; stress (e.g. fatigue, aches and pains, sleep problems, etc.) and depressive symptoms were reported to have decreased!

Depressive and stress symptoms' correlation to what you eat may vary by sex!

Researchers also found that consumption of unhealthy foods were associated with increased stress symptoms in women only, while men (but not women) who consumed fish and other seafood were found to report a lower frequency of depressive symptoms.



Healthy Eating in University

- **Check out your university's kitchen menu!** Some universities use apps like **Nutrislice** to display each meal's nutritional info and allergens.
- **Check if your university provides access to a campus dietician or nutritionist.** Some universities offer in-person and/or email consultations with a dietary professional. Consulting a professional is a great way to make sure you're eating healthy in a way that works for you!

SLEEP AND EMOTIONAL LABOUR

How important is sleep?

Getting 7+ hours of uninterrupted sleep every night has been shown to be positively correlated with **higher life satisfaction** (one's own evaluation of their quality of life) and associated with a **decreased risk** of developing cardiovascular disease, diabetes, hypertension, obesity, and other associated chronic illnesses.

How are sleep and emotional labour related?

A common experience amongst students in university is putting sleep on the back-burner in favour of studying, socialization, scrolling on social media, etc. Remember that you can improve your overall health, life satisfaction and performance in school simply by prioritizing how much sleep you get every night! Researchers have found that getting 7+ hours of solid sleep every night helps you maintain not only **consistently high life satisfaction**, but also your **resilience** in the face of emotional labour. Maintaining a healthy sleep schedule throughout university can help **protect your emotional well-being!**

What is emotional labour?

Emotional labour is defined as the process of **self-regulating feelings** and facial expressions to please others. Emotional labour is commonly observed within friendships and relationships and has been associated with **emotional burnout** in individuals.

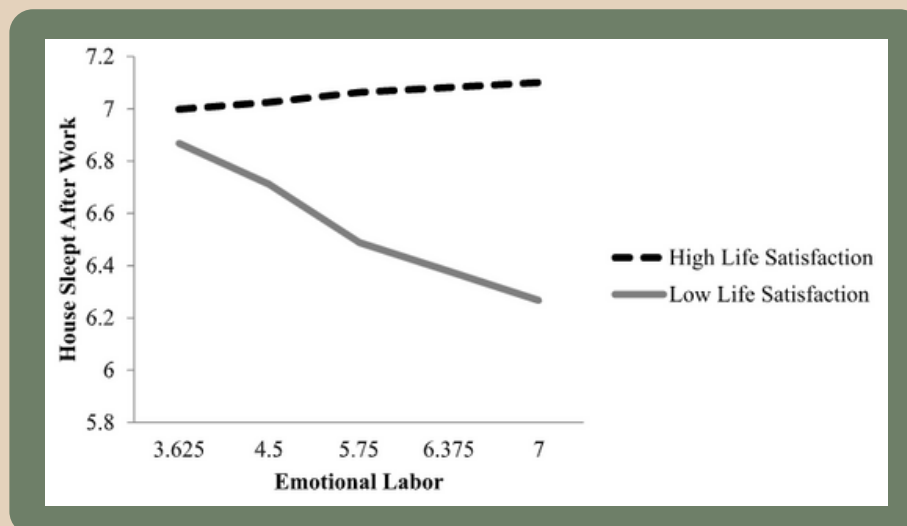


Image source: McGinley, S. P., & Wei, W. (2020). Emotional labor and sleep: The moderating effect of life satisfaction. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 43, 278–282. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2019.11.006>

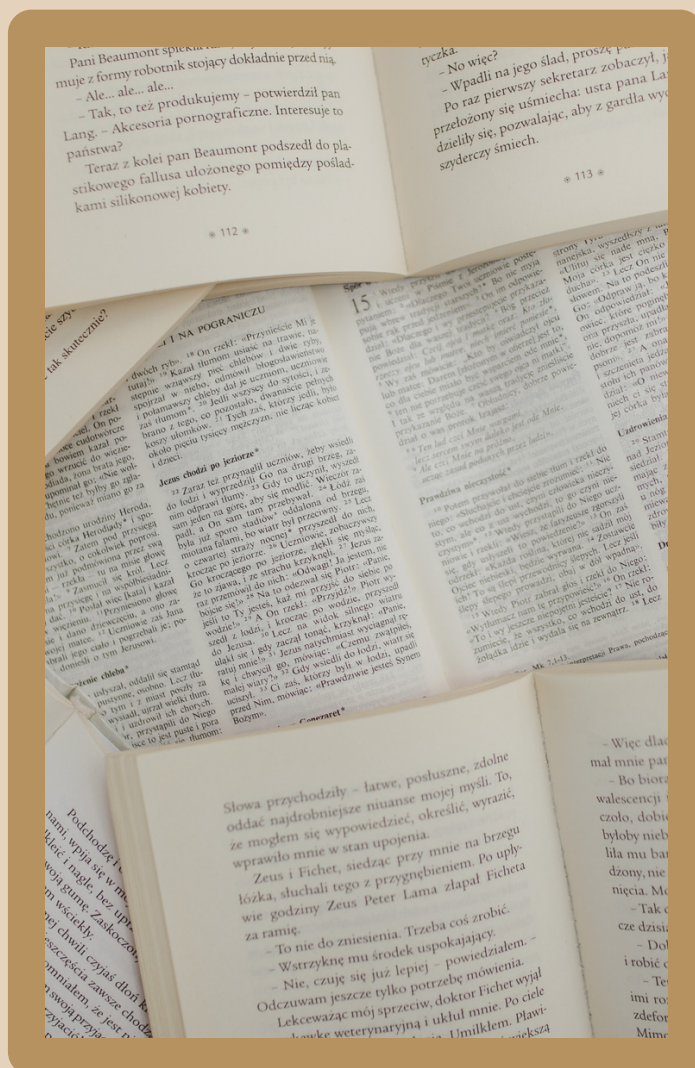
MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY

What is mental health literacy? Mental health literacy (MHL) is an individual's beliefs and knowledge about mental health and illnesses. Having a high level of MHL can help an individual manage, recognize, and prevent their own mental health-related struggles. High MHL has been associated with an increased intent to take preventative action against mental illness.

Can mental health literacy play a role in preventing depression?

A study published in the Journal of American College Health found that university students were particularly at risk of being diagnosed with depression throughout their years at school. Depression is becoming recognized as an increasingly impactful illness and it is therefore important to know how to identify and treat early symptoms. **High mental health literacy** amongst university students has been shown to **increase one's motivation** and ability to recognize and act against early warning signs of depression.

Remember that **the more you know** about your mental health, the more you can take appropriate action when you start feeling down!



MANAGING MENTAL HEALTH TIPS

Many universities provide students with free mental health-related consultations

Universities with student health centres have lowered student reimbursement rates for mental health related consultations, demonstrating that universities are playing an active role in their students' mental health journeys.

How can one's resilience correlate with their success in their studies?

According to a study done by Guo et al., developing resilience through a framework of practices (see image) can aid in not only academic success but also in taking the strain off of temporary mental health problems that can stand in the way of success.

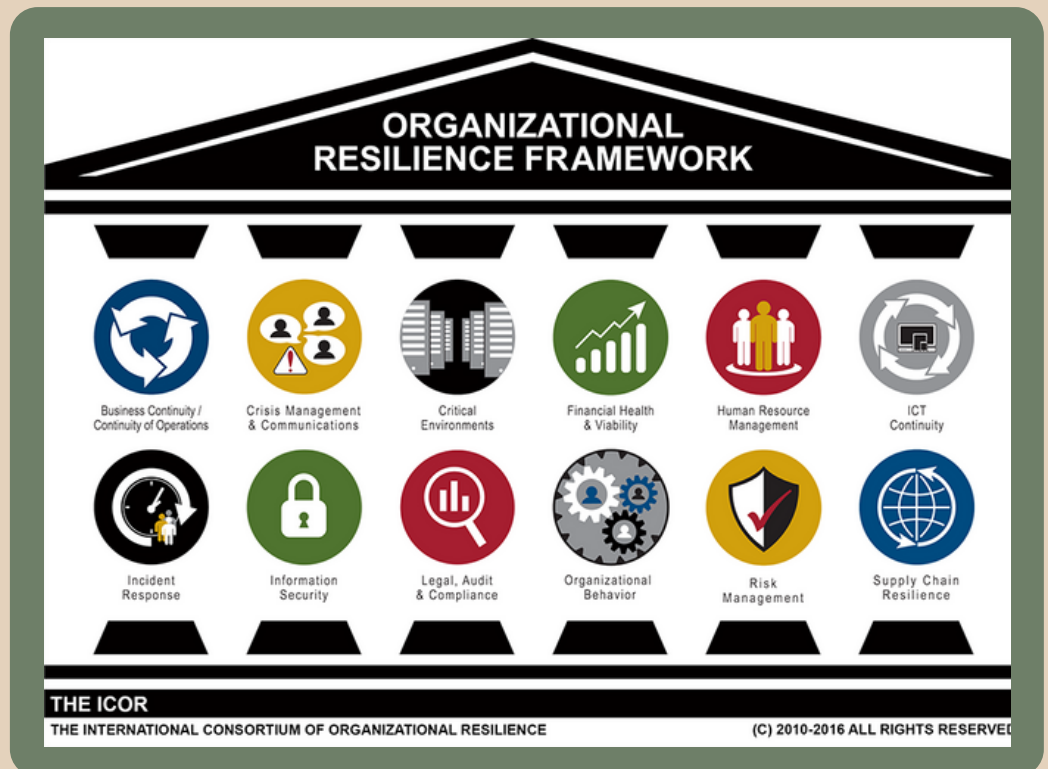


Image source: Hartley, M. T. (2013). Investigating the Relationship of Resilience to Academic Persistence in College Students With Mental Health Issues. *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*, 56(4), 240-250. doi:10.1177/0034355213480527

MORE MENTAL HEALTH TIPS

What do Canadian students do to cope with mental health issues in university?



RESOURCES

- **Crisis Centre BC:** reach volunteers trained to provide mental health support for a variety of crises at crisiscentre.bc.ca
- **Now Matters Now:** learn dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT) skills to manage stress while seeking out professional support at nowmattersnow.org
- **Free guided meditation apps:** Insight Timer, UCLA Mindfulness

Here's the rundown:

- **Consider seeking out a non-campus-affiliated therapist or counsellor.** This is often a great option for those who feel they need more time with a professional than their university may be able to provide.
- **Build your social network.** Spending time with friends is a great way to alleviate stress. Remember to balance your studying with social breaks!
- **Exercise.** Even during busy periods, fitting regular exercise into your schedule comes with many positive outcomes. Exercise is key to maintaining both physical and mental well-being.
- **Meditation.** Focusing your energy into breathing, even for a short period of time, helps clear your mind of any stress or disruptive thoughts. Practicing meditation over time has been shown to improve focus and concentration.



LEARNING TIPS FOR STUDENTS

Improve your learning with study tips
founded in learning diversity and mental
health research!

Your Mindset Matters

Metacognition, awareness of your own thought patterns and their underlying processes, is an important influence in one's learning. Starting university, especially with a learning diversity, can be challenging at times, but your mindset and attitude toward learning is crucial to success. **Attribution theory**, the basis behind metacognition in learning, posits that those who attribute their successes to their own hard work and merit exhibit greater perseverance when faced with challenges. When school starts getting hard, remember that you've put the work in! Any success you experience is a result of your own hard work and dedication, not because you just happened to have good luck the day of your test, assignment, etc. Using **metacognitive awareness** to train your brain to give yourself credit for your successes is key to maintaining motivation and good work ethic.

Learn From Your Peers

Here's what university students are doing to excel in school.

1

CLASS SEATING

Where you sit in class really makes a difference in your learning. Sitting closer to your professors may seem daunting, but it's a great way to make the classroom feel smaller. Sitting close to the front is a common strategy used by students with learning diversities as it takes the nerves out of asking questions. It's hard to be intimidated by a large class if you can't see them behind you!

2

CHOOSING YOUR WORKSPACE WISELY

As much as the chatter of other students can be white noise to some, it can be very distracting to students who have trouble focusing. Students who struggle to focus often find non-distracting areas on campus to do their work. Take advantage of the silent study areas your university may offer to get your work and reading done.

3

SUBVOCALIZING

Subvocalizing is a common focus strategy in which students silently or barely audibly utter the words as they read them. Many students practice subvocalizing as a way to keep their mind from wandering as they read.

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