Looking After Yourself at University

Heading to university is rarely a walk in the park. You might feel overwhelmed by the number of assignments, the deadlines, settling into new accommodation, meeting new people from different cultures, coming into your independence, learning about your new responsibilities and the most prominent for many 'freshers' are the feelings of homesickness. Sometimes the fear of the unknown leads a person to abandon the idea altogether and they don't even apply. I've been there, as many other university students have, and at times it led me to question: How can university life be something that you want to experience? But trust me, it is! In retrospect, I've come to realise that all these experiences and feelings, including homesickness, are actually great teachers; you will come out as a **more grounded person** because it all builds character.

Moving out of your current home can be a daunting thought, but regardless of whether or not you go to university, moving is inevitable. So don't let that hold you back! The more you settle into your new lifestyle, the easier it gets! Before long, you find yourself becoming more independent and you start trusting yourself. Later on, you might even find yourself learning about new and undiscovered parts of your personality that you didn't know of before university. I know I did.

If you're looking for an exact guide on how to deal with e.g. feelings of homesickness, then you should know that there isn't one. Different things work for different people. However, tips from others in the same situation as you can be inspiring. For example, seeking advice and talking to others about their strategies for looking after themselves can provide you with a different viewpoint, which could be transformative to your mind set at that moment in time. It's important to know though, that you might not find this as helpful when you are having an 'off-day,' and that is why you have to **listen to yourself** and create a (mind) space in which you feel embraced.

I've been doing art for years, so when I started University I decided to continue with that by attending art classes that are usually organised in a building called 'The Hex' at our Colchester Campus. You become more grounded to your own self by doing something that feels close to your heart, which provides you with a sort of safety net. I also joined a yoga society, which has taught me great lessons throughout my studies and helped me to make new friends. Studying can sometimes leave you with complex and chaotic thoughts, but I find that yoga and socialising in a healthy way, clears my mind and leaves a space for other growing thoughts instead of the chaotic ones.

Studying Psychoanalysis has also encouraged me to focus more on being 'mindful' by turning inwards, and having a conversation with myself. Checking in with ourselves like this and thinking about how we're feeling is something we tend to forget to do, especially when life is so fast paced! By being mindful, we can **avoid feeling overwhelmed** when all of our emotions eventually bubble to the surface, which can have a negative impact on our mental state of mind and the way we start perceiving the world around us. That's why I would like to remind you to slow down, step back, look around, take in and reflect on how you're feeling.

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Keeping the balance between studying and doing other things like cooking, going out with friends, grocery shopping, or catching up with a family is important. Take a break to do different activities that you find enjoyable such as joining a society or club run by the Student Union. These could range from art, sports, departmental to cultural ones, or other activities that take your mind away from studying mode. Or just simply learn when to rest and don't feel guilty for it!

Enjoy the little things in life, such as welcoming the sunrise or having a chat with your parents or a friend. Go someplace that you haven't been to before, walk in nature along the river, grow veggies or fruits, take care of plants, lie in the grass, be creative and play!

If you still feel anxious or stressed due to assignments, other responsibilities, or something else, **check in with yourself** and slow down. Try to figure out why you're feeling anxious and what you can do about it. There's no rush, don't stress too much about what might happen if you don't finish an assignment in time, because usually, you always finish the essay, project, or exam in the end!

However, if the anxious feelings become too persistent, get in touch with someone you trust or the university services. For example, the University of Essex has Nightline and Chat with Charlie as online mental health support. You could also contact your Peer Mentor or Student Wellbeing Team and arrange a phone or Skype consultation if you don't want to see someone in-person. Taking care of your mental health is not something to put aside but an important part of self-development.

Many of our overwhelming feelings arise from fearing the future and making assumptions based on that fear, which leaves me to say… you can change that by focusing on the present moment.

Remember to **trust the process**! You will be going through a 'transformation' when you go to University, you will be adopting a new life and finding what feels important to you as a person.

Be playful!

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