

what it takes

For All Students

October 29, 2023

Understanding and Managing Anxiety

Hey Students,

Did you know that almost 40% of college students report that they often feel anxious? Maybe you are worried about an upcoming exam, a relationship on the rocks, whether you will get a good job, or even how you will approach a social situation over the weekend. Totally normal!

College is a stressful time and many feel overwhelmed, resulting in symptoms of anxiety. They may include feeling restless, nervous, tense, or unable to relax; trouble concentrating; headaches, stomach aches, or other physical symptoms; trouble sleeping; racing thoughts or constant worrying; replaying situations over and over in your head; fears about the future; and even worrying about anxiety itself.

Everyone experiences anxiety. It is often a normal, and even a healthy part of life. Anxiety can alert us that something requires our attention, is dangerous, or requires careful thought or planning. Often, when you put some effort into effectively managing whatever is causing your anxiety, it resolves itself on its own. Other times, anxiety is not so healthy. It overwhelms us and goes from a helpful warning system to something that consumes too much of our time and energy. Successfully managing anxiety is a skill that can be learned.

We have a few tips for you to use when you are feeling particularly stressed or anxious:

- **Use your body.** When your body is tired, your brain is tired and calmer too. Exercise regularly, and when you are feeling anxious, doing some pushups, jumping jacks, going for a run, or lifting some weights can really help!
- **Practice self-compassion and kindness.** Come up with some phrases that you can repeat to yourself that are encouraging like “I can do hard things,” “This is a rough patch, but I can make it through,” “I am strong, capable, and resilient,” or “I love myself, others, and the world.”
- **Have a centering comfort image you can easily access.** At a time when you are not feeling anxious, think of something that is comforting to you—the feel of warm laundry, rain on the window, sitting under a palm tree with warm sun filtering through, or petting a beloved pet. During those times when you are anxious, think about that image and try to put your senses in it—what does it sound like, what does it feel like? You can even put this image symbolically into an object that you carry with you like a worry stone.
- **Learn and practice grounding techniques.** This may include deep breathing—in and out for 7 seconds each—squeezing your fists tightly for 30 seconds and then letting go to feel those sensations; practicing the 5 senses, which involves identifying 5 things you can currently

see, 4 things you hear, 3 things you feel, 2 things you smell, and 1 thing you taste; or rubbing your hands together briskly for a few seconds and placing them on your face or over your heart to feel the warmth.

- **Practice the RAIN method.** This acronym stands for **R**ecognize, **A**llow, **I**nvestigate, **N**urture (or non-identify). What this means is that we can *recognize* that we are feeling anxiety and not try to make it go away. We *allow* ourselves to feel the feelings we are experiencing and avoid judging them as good or bad; we simply allow them to be present. Then we can become curious about what we are experiencing and *investigate* by asking ourselves questions like: Where am I feeling this in my body? What may have triggered this feeling? What do I need right now? Finally, we can choose to *non-identify* with the feeling of anxiety by observing it, but not inviting it to control or overwhelm us. *Nurture* yourself by viewing the emotion as something that is coming through you and will pass, not viewing it as part of who you are.

These are just a few of the many ways you can manage typical anxious feelings. Of course, if using these kinds of tips is not helping, or you feel your anxiety is becoming debilitating, reaching out for help is always encouraged.

We want to remind you that we have a Center for Student Counseling right here on campus on the ground floor of Kettler Hall. You can call 260-481-6200 or email csc@pfw.edu to make an appointment. If you are experiencing a non-life-threatening crisis or have a more immediate need, stop in to see us during our open hours—Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Tuesdays from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m., and Fridays from 9 a.m. to noon. All students are also welcome to use our quiet study space and low-sensory relaxation area with recliners, headphones, weighted blankets, fidgets, and relaxing sights and sounds if you just need to get away from it all.

If you are ever in crisis after hours or are concerned for your own health and safety or that of others, please proceed to an emergency room, call 911, or contact University Police at 260-481-6827.

Remember, anxiety is normal. You often have the tools you need to manage it on your own, but if you need additional assistance, we are always here to help!

All my best,



Dr. Krissy Surface
Vice Chancellor
Enrollment Management and the Student Experience



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