

# International Students and Mental Health

Campus Wellness

Presented by: Dr. Aziz Nashef, Psychologist

Counselling Services



UNIVERSITY OF  
**WATERLOO**



# **Information About Mental Health**

# What is Mental Health?

- Just like physical health, everyone has mental health to care for.
- Your mental health is the foundation for your emotional well-being and ability to function in your environment.
- Students with positive mental health:
  - Realize their own abilities
  - Cope with the normal stresses of life
  - Work and study productively

# Who Can Help?

- Counsellors
- Doctors
- Psychologists
- Psychiatrists
- Nurses

In Counselling Services and Health Services, Campus Wellness provides access to all of these types of professionals.



# **Cultural Differences and Perceptions of Mental Health**

# Stigma and Mental Health

- Many people don't ask for help because they feel ashamed or scared they will be labelled as 'crazy', 'weak', 'lazy', or 'inadequate'.
- Some people are afraid friends or family might judge them and treat them negatively because they sought the help of a mental health professional.

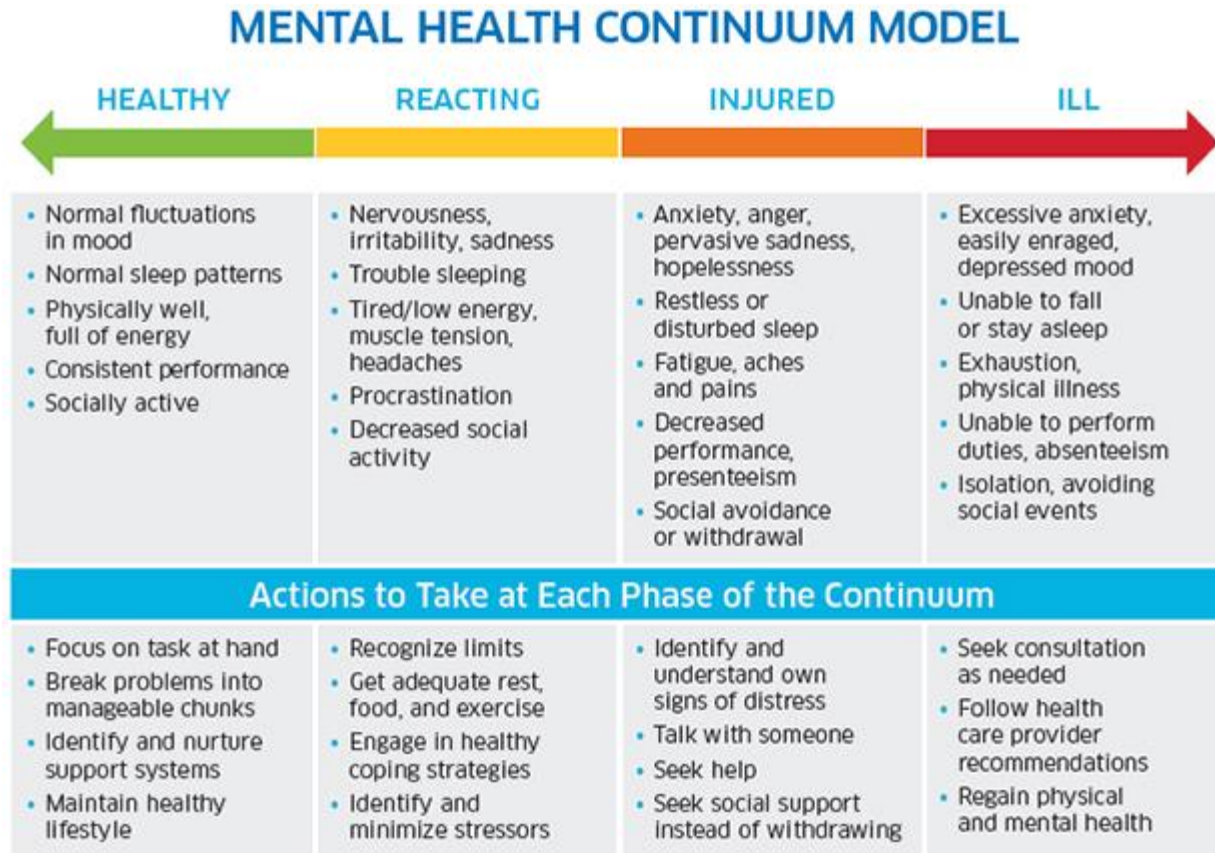


# The reality is

- We all need a little help sometimes and that is okay.
- That doesn't mean anything negative about us, it simply means we are human.
- Humans have emotions, concerns, thoughts, needs and stresses.
- Mental health professionals can help you balance these important pieces of yourself.
- 1 in 5 Canadians will seek out help for their mental health in their life time. Over 1900 UW students sought help from Counselling Services in Fall term 2016. You are not alone.



# Mental Health Spectrum



Source: Mental Health Commission of Canada <http://img.mhcc.ca/English/initiatives-and-projects/working-mind>



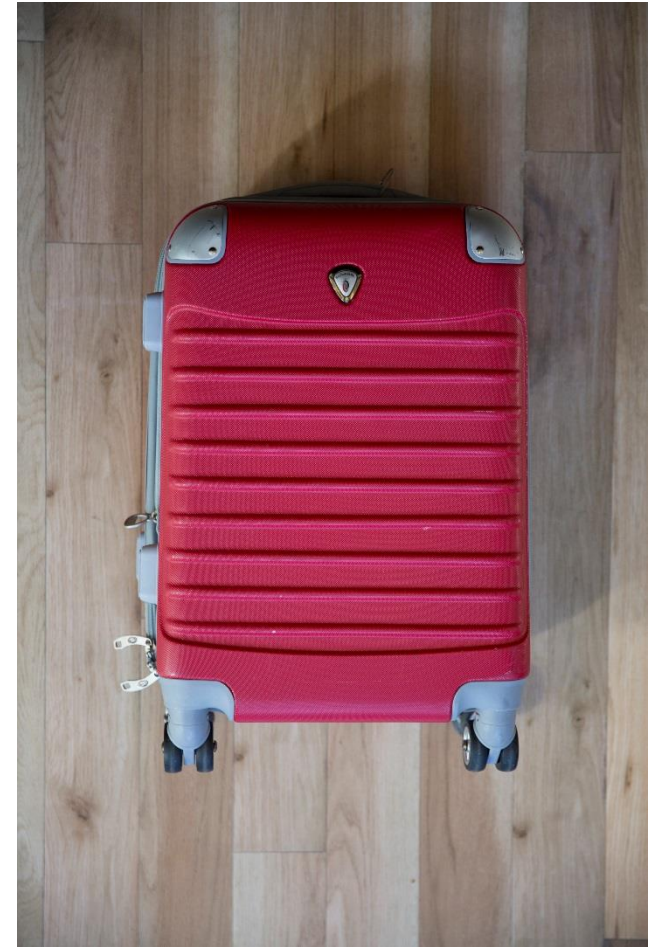
# **Culture Shock**

## Definition and Strategies for Coping

# Cultural Adjustment and Culture Shock

- Culture shock includes:
  - The anxiety produced when you move to a completely new environment
  - Not knowing what to do or how to do things because the situation is new
  - Lack of familiarity of one's normal customs
  - Physical and emotional discomfort

Often sets in after the first few days or weeks of entering a new country (but also may not happen at all)



# Symptoms

Many people are not fully prepared for the impact a new culture may have on them. They might experience:

- Extreme homesickness
- Desire to avoid social settings
- Hostility towards the host culture
- Depression and feelings of helplessness
- Difficulty with coursework and concentration
- Anxiety related to new food, weather, and cultural expectations
- Difficulties sleeping
- Differences in personality

It is important to remember that this is a very normal process that nearly everyone goes through.

# What Can You Do About Culture Shock?

- Understand that culture shock is a normal and understandable reaction
- Recognize what you are feeling
- Understand that you are not a failure
- Get involved in your host culture
- Familiarize yourself with your host culture
- Keep busy
- Talk to someone



# **The Idea of Self-Care**

## And Tips for Practicing

# What is Self-Care?

You might have heard the term self-care before but you might be unsure of what it means. Self-care activities are things you can do to help yourself achieve a better life balance.

Achieving this balance can help you when times get stressful because your system is in a more optimal state before the high-stress time starts.





# Self-Care Tip One: Regular Meals

Eating regularly helps fuel your body and brain to help you get through your day-to-day commitments and gives you focus.

Try to get three nutritious meals a day and pack yourself healthy snacks when you aren't at home.





# Self-Care Tip Two: Exercise

Giving your body a break from sitting while you are studying is important. Exercise has been linked to stress reduction in many studies.

Try to stay connected with the activities you enjoyed before coming to university or take the opportunity to try something new! The Athletics department offers many different opportunities on campus for you to get active.



# Self-Care Tip Three: Sleep

Give your mind and body a time to rest each day. Studies have shown a correlation between getting good sleep and grades. Getting a regular seven to nine hours of sleep per day is an essential part of self-care.

For more information about sleep health and tips for sleeping well, see our [Sleeping Well](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z0a3EPHN77A) seminar (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z0a3EPHN77A>).



# Self-Care Tip Four: Deep Breathing and Meditation

Meditation and guided relaxation exercises are quick activities you can do to promote stress reduction and fit self-care into your daily routine. Recent studies have shown that just 10 minutes of meditation a day can lower anxiety.

For guided meditations and relaxation exercises, see our online workshops and seminars (<https://goo.gl/6PJeJg>).



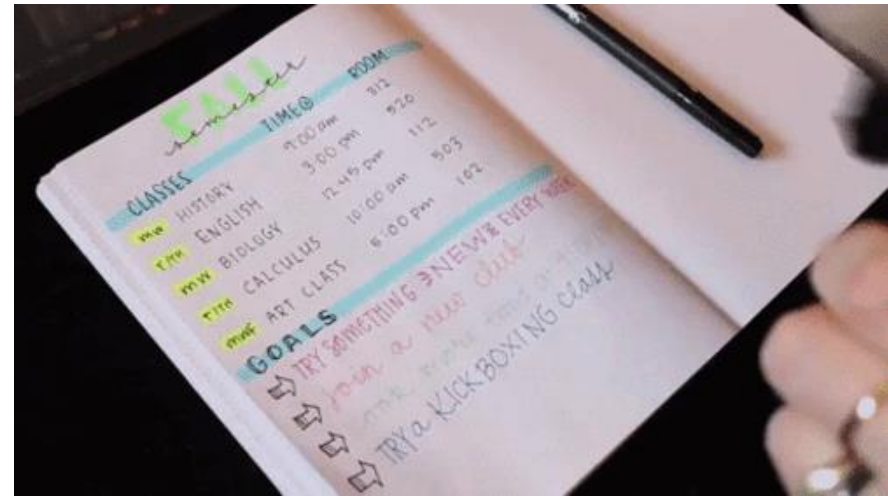
# **The Idea of Resiliency**

## And Tips for Practicing

# What is Resiliency?

According to the American Psychological Association, resilience is: “the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress...It means ‘bouncing back’ from difficult experiences.”

Building your resiliency skills can help you face life’s ups and downs more evenly, enabling you to be able to handle change and adversity when they come along.



# **Resiliency Tip One: Self-Esteem and Coping Thoughts**

Remember your strengths and accomplishments when you are feeling down. You can pick big things, like getting into UW or a sports victory, or small, like holding the door open for someone. Think about a time that you went out of your way to help someone.

Use coping thoughts to remind yourself that an upsetting situation is temporary. If you are struggling to get along with a roommate, remind yourself that you'll be moving out in four months. If you don't enjoy the subject matter of a course, remind yourself that the class is only 12 weeks long and then you'll have a new set of courses you might enjoy more.



# Resiliency Tip Two: Give Yourself A Break

Take time to engage in activities that promote self-care. Set up a weekly call with a friend, family member, or mentor back home and keep them up to date on your accomplishments big and small. They can help remind you of good times you've had and strategies that have worked for you in the past.

Find an activity you enjoy that engages your brain creatively that isn't studying like doing a puzzle, drawing, planting a garden, learning to knit, playing a musical instrument, or singing.





# Resiliency Tip Three: Positive Self-Talk

Take a good look at your thoughts and what you tell yourself day-to-day without even realizing it. Sometimes we suffer from patterns of thinking called cognitive distortions. For example, you might often turn to overgeneralization, where you see a single negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat.

Imagine you ask someone on a date and they decline. If you were overgeneralizing you might think “I’m never going to get a date. No one will ever want me.” When in reality, this current rejection only applies to one possible date in a whole lifetime of dating possibilities. To practice positive self-talk in this instance, you might instead tell yourself, “This time it didn't work out, but that doesn't mean I won't go out with someone else. I have lots of great qualities and I just need to find the right person.”

# Resiliency Tip Four: Set Goals and Problem-Solve

Help yourself during difficult times by completing a six-step plan:

1. Identify the problem you are facing and state the problem as clearly and objectively as you can.
2. Take a moment to understand the problem – have you faced it before and what did you do then? What would be different if the problem were solved?
3. Brainstorm possible solutions, trying to generate at least five solutions without any judgement about what would work best.
4. Compare your options, listing pros and cons of each and eliminating the least desirable or actionable options.
5. Choose a solution. Rank your possible plans in order of preference and make a plan to carry out what you've chosen.
6. Take action on the plans you've made. Set effective and achievable goals for how to do what you intend to do and do them!

# **Resources Available**

# Confidentiality and Campus Wellness

- Stress and anxiety are some of the main reasons students visit a mental health professional.
- Counselling is completely confidential within the bounds of the law.
- There are no negative implications for your academic future (The visit will not be seen on your transcript).



# On Campus Resources

- Counselling Services – 519-888-4567 ext. 32655
- Health Services – 519-888-4096
  - Student Medical Clinic - For University of Waterloo students
  - Family Health Clinic – If you have dependents or family members who have travelled with you for your studies, they can access the Family Health Clinic.
- Student Success Office – [uwaterloo.ca/student-success/](https://uwaterloo.ca/student-success/)
  - International student resources including Immigration advising, International Peer Community, English Conversation Circles, and more.
- UW MATES Peer support program - <https://feds.ca/feds-services/uw-mates>

# Phone Resources

- **Good2Talk** is a 24/7 help line for all post-secondary students in Ontario:  
**1-866-925-5454**
- **Here 24/7** is the Region of Waterloo help line:  
**1-844-437-3247**



**1.866.925.5454**

**Post-Secondary Student Helpline**



# Disclaimer

The information on the University of Waterloo Counselling Services site is not intended as a substitute for medical professional help or advice but is to be used only as an aid. A physician should always be consulted for any health problem or medical condition.

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