COUNSELLING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES BULLETIN

MESSAGE FROM THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

After many months of uncertainty, students have finally returned to university campuses across the country. Returning to campus however, does not mean the uncertainty has gone. On the contrary there are many reasons why the normal stresses of university life continue to be compounded by factors directly or indirectly related to the pandemic. Social distancing and so much time spent away from the natural bustle of university campuses has led to an increase in social anxiety for many students especially as some of them have had difficult events occur in their lives.

While there is no universally definitive measure to identify a student of concern, there are a few common warning signs that may indicate distress or significant emotional concern in a student:

- Marked nervousness, agitation, or irritability
- Inappropriately aggressive or abrasive behaviour
- Excessive procrastination and/or poorly prepared work
- Pattern of infrequent class attendance, little or no work completed
- Apparent depression or lack of energy
- Marked change in personal hygiene
- Withdrawal, indecisiveness and/or confusion
- Comments (written or verbal) that suggest thoughts about harming oneself, or any threats to another person
- Bizarre, alarming statements, or evidence that a student is engaging in dangerous behaviour

CAPS is available to consult whenever there is a difficult situation; please take advantage of this resource by emailing us on student.counselling@lums.edu.pk.

Best wishes,
Dr. Tahira Haider

ADJUSTING IN POST-COVID LIFE
BY SABEEN

Things may feel out-of-control right now. You may be facing a lot of unknowns and disruptions. Try to be patient with yourself, your classmates, and your instructors during this time. Making a plan and adjusting your studying may help you regain a little of your sense of control. Here are some tips to help guide you:
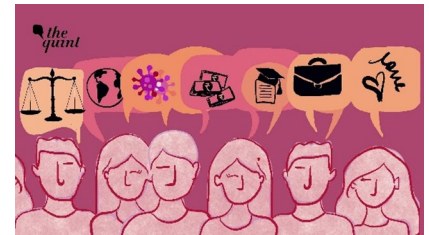
Everyone will feel different and that's OK
The crucial thing to remember as you go back to campus life is that everyone's experiences and expectations will be different. Some of you will have been on campus with in-person teaching for some time and may be either welcoming or fearful of the imminent rise in numbers. Some of you will be itching to get back to campus; others may be feeling anxious about it.

Some of you will have been shielding because of health conditions and these conditions may still present significant concerns. Some of you may have disabilities for which remote learning has been helpful and may be concerned about how your needs will be met in the return to face-to-face teaching. Others may have found that remote working reduced your engagement because of a disability and may be worried about how you will re-engage now.

Setting a schedule
As the situation continues to unfold, you may have fewer social commitments and/or group meetings. Setting a schedule for yourself can help provide structure and keep you motivated. If you don't already keep a daily or weekly calendar, try following a schedule to organise your time. Your mental health is incredibly important, so be sure to include time for exercise and self-care.

Stay connected and engaged
Even during social distancing, connecting with family and friends virtually can be more important than ever. Consider:
- Scheduling video calls with family and friends. Talking to loved ones can be really helpful when you feel stressed or nervous about something.
- Taking a break to laugh is also important.
- Attend virtual office hours or study groups so that you can stay updated on your coursework.

Avoiding multitasking

If you're doing more work on your own and your time is less structured, you might be more tempted to multitask. Many people think they can do multiple things at once, but research shows that only about 2% of the population can multitask. Even if you feel like you're multitasking, you're probably not…really, you're switching between tasks very quickly, or 'microtasking.'

Time to sleep

During the pandemic, we slept longer in the morning and 42% of us abandoned our alarm clocks. We didn't need to worry about commuting or preparing lunch for work, so we woke up, on average, an hour later during the work day. At the same time, we went to bed 48 minutes later than usual. Our weekend catch-up sleep was also reduced during Covid, as we no longer needed it, all of which we need to take into consideration when going back to University. What changes should you introduce in your sleep hygiene to ensure you get enough hours of sleep? Do you need to go to bed earlier? Make sure you plan for it to avoid unnecessary tiredness.

Give yourself time

Processing any significant change takes time and many of us will do this in different ways. Some people want to resume their lives that they feel have been put on hold. Others have perhaps enjoyed the slower, reflective pace of life and want to continue living this way. Both are totally understandable positions.

However, reflecting on loss, trauma or hardship cannot be done in just a few moments, and our ability to process this will fluctuate over time. One moment you may feel fine and the next feel anxious about something else. It may surprise you how easily you return to some aspects of "normal life" and how difficult others will be. It is important to remember that in times where nothing seems to be normal, feeling lots of emotions at once is completely normal. What is "normal" has changed, and some of these changes may be permanent.
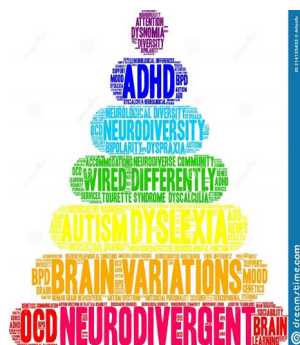
THE CONUNDRUMS OF NEURODIVERSITY AND COMMUNICATION

BY NIDA ZAFAR

The term Neurodiversity was coined in 1998, and it refers to the differences in the human brain. It mainly focuses on social ability, learning, mood, thoughts, attention and focus in a non-pathological capacity. The Neurodiversity movement believes that instead of looking at these neurological differences as disorders it is pertinent to look at them as disabilities caused by social barriers. It focuses on looking at each individual as equal but unique, with his/her own strengths and weaknesses.

The biggest social barrier comes when an individual isn't able to clearly communicate what they want or how they feel. The first step to fix this is to break down the stigma around Neurodiversity by raising awareness so that individuals feel comfortable talking about their particular needs. Some other communication tips that are helpful are:

- First and foremost listen, empathise, accept, and apply
- Try openly discussing differences in processing, thinking and behavioral patterns so that there is more transparency in the communication and less chances of misunderstanding

- Discuss modes of communication, as certain people communicate better verbally while others, especially Neurodivergent people, may prefer different modes of communication like writing or other non-verbal modes
- Try making the rhythm of communication brief, where each person is speaking for a shorter period of time
- A lot of Neurodivergent people get exhausted and drained by small talk and gossip. Personal stories aren't draining, only if you are exceptionally close but the level of focus depends on sensory stimulation
- Bullet points and practical communication is best responded to
- Try ignoring unusual body language like a lack of eye contact or the speaker often moving focus. These aren't a personal lack of interest in the
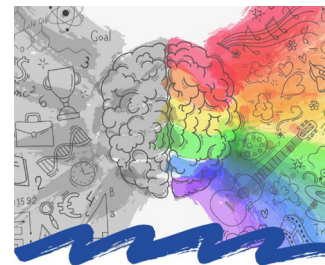
- conversation or disrespect to you but unique to a person's Neurodiversity
- Embrace honesty, as Neurodivergent people are often very honest and frank
- Neurodivergent people often need none or minimal assurance, hence also aren't able to see that others might require it, so communicating your needs is important

HOW CAN I BE MORE SELF-COMPASSIONATE?

BY ANUSHAY KHAN

There is an old saying that goes: 'You are your own worst critic'.

It is very true that most of us are hard on ourselves, particularly if we get even the slightest hint that we don't "match up" in some way – in either our achievements, relationships or even appearance. Therefore, if we make even the slightest mistake, we tend to berate ourselves. Such an approach is known as 'self-criticism' and might not be as helpful towards personal growth as we may think.

An alternate approach could be to foster a more 'self-compassionate' attitude.

Self-compassion is the ability to turn understanding, acceptance and love inward.

Research shows that self-compassion has many benefits. It is shown to increase motivation, boost happiness, improve body-image, enhance self-worth, and foster resilience. It also reduces mental health problems such as anxiety, depression and stress.

Therefore, self-compassion involves finding a healthy balance between self-acceptance and self-improvement. Instead of criticising yourself for making a mistake, you instead, adopt a kind, but realistic view of your experience.

To be able to respond to ourselves compassionately, we must first be aware that we are struggling and when our mind leaps into self-critical thinking, which only worsens our struggle. We also need to be able to 'slow ourselves down' and attain a heightened sense of awareness.

How do we do this?
1) Breathing plays an important role when it comes to our physical and emotional state.

When we are anxious, which often results due to self-critical thinking, our body goes into 'threat mode.' Our breathing rate becomes faster and a number of other physiological changes occur to prime us for fight, flight or freeze actions.

Slow breathing is our key to slowing down our body and mind, switch on the 'pause button' and reset. To start out, try taking a deep breath in for four seconds, hold the breath for two seconds and release the breath for six seconds. This calms your body and mind, and allows it to change our self-critical thought process to a more self-compassionate one.

2) Moreover, to change your **thinking** from self-critical to self-compassionate, you can try asking yourself the following questions:

- What is the trigger? (a situation, thought or memory bringing about uncomfortable emotions inside you)
- What is the self-critical part of me saying?
- What tone of voice is it using?
- How much do I believe the self-critical thoughts?
- What emotion(s) am I feeling?

And then use Slow Breathing to calm your mind and then ask yourself:

- What advice would I give to a friend I deeply care about who was thinking and feeling this way?

- What does the compassionate part of me want to say to the self-critical part?
- What are some more ways of viewing this situation that are more kind, realistic and helpful for me?
- What can I do to cope and look after myself now?

And in conclusion:
- What is a more compassionate and helpful conclusion to replace the criticism?
- How much do I believe the self-critical thoughts now?
- How intense is my initial main emotion now?

WHAT WOULD PEOPLE SAY?

BY BUSHRA AKRAM

"Other people's perception of you is none of your business."
Those who are fearful of social situations have the following **thinking errors**

- **Fortune telling/catastrophising**
  "What if my question is considered silly? Everyone would make fun of me. What if I stutter? If I shiver people will notice."

- **Mind reading and personalisation**
  "I'm not good looking therefore I am ignored. My professor didn't look at me because I am not a good student"

Dispute your thoughts by asking yourself the following questions

- What's the evidence?
- Is it possible to be liked by everyone?
- What does it mean if someone doesn't like you?
- If one likes you and one doesn't who's right?
- Can you think of very special renowned people who were disliked by some people? What about Jesus?
- Is your thinking based on facts or are you mind reading?
- Are you taking the event as it is or are you trying to predict the future?
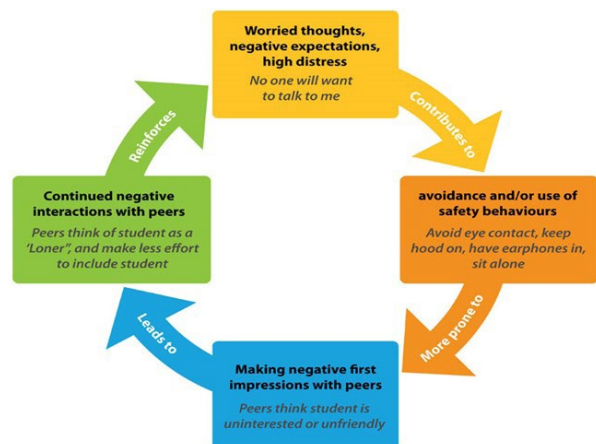
Categorise your anxiety trigger into solvable or unsolvable. For a solvable anxiety trigger, several steps could be taken to mitigate its effect. Furthermore, if the source of anxiety is unsolvable then it is useless to repeatedly worry about the unknown.

Social anxiety can be managed by **shifting** your focus from yourself to the surroundings and trying to be mindful of them. This could be managed through **self-talk** which could include

"Everyone in their life suffers with anxiety. If you will find someone shivering or stuttering will you ridicule them? I'm not the focus of attention even though I am feeling so. Never go through the situation in your mind unless you have to pick the positives."

SURVIVING A CRISIS WITH TIPP

BY MARIA AYUB

Have you ever encountered an emotional crisis where you felt as if your emotions are at a breaking point, making it difficult to keep them under control and to handle the situation well? When under crisis, our mind and body go into survival mode where we find it really difficult to use adaptive coping strategies. In such situations, using TIPP skills can help you bring down the intensity of these difficult emotions. Four TIPP skills, described in Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), include Temperature, Intense exercise, Paced breathing, and Paired muscle relaxation.
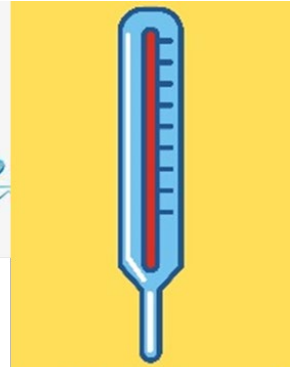
T – Temperature: During a crisis, our body tends to feel hot. Changing your body temperature by splashing cold water on your face, standing in front of the AC, squeezing an ice cube or rubbing it on your face, or eating/drinking something cold can help cool you down both emotionally and physically. You can also dip your face in cold water and hold your breath.
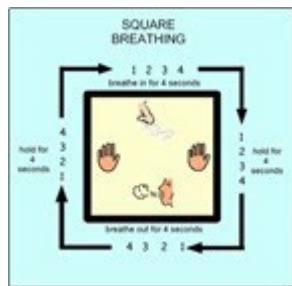
I – Intense Exercise: By engaging in intense cardio/ aerobic exercise, we engage our physical body in a way that de-escalates intense emotions as it can help give an outlet to excess anxious energy. Doing jumping jacks, brisk walking, running up and down some stairs, jumping rope or playing basketball can help lower the negative energy. The increased oxygen flow can help decrease stress levels.

P – Paced Breathing: Slow, deep breathing soothes the nervous system and increases oxygen flow. The key is to breathe out longer than you are breathing in. In order to reduce the physical manifestation of the overwhelming emotions you feel (e.g., increased heart rate, flushed face, dry mouth, sweating etc.) it helps to try to control your breathing so that its rate will eventually decrease. Try the following technique: breathe in deeply through your nose (abdominal breathing) for four seconds and then breathe out through your mouth (for six seconds). Do this for 1-2 minutes.

P – Paired Muscle Relaxation: When you tighten a muscle and then allow it to rest, it will be more relaxed than it was before you tightened it. Relaxed muscles require less oxygen, so your heart rate and breathing will naturally slow down. It's important to say "relax" to yourself as you exhale and relax your muscles. By saying "relax" to yourself, you're pairing that word with the feeling of relaxing. This will help your ability to relax at times when you need to. You can watch this video for further guidance.

A TIP for TIPP: Practice each of these techniques before so you know what they feel like. Then use them, when you feel an overwhelming emotion.

SELF-SCHEMAS & THEIR IMPACT

BY ADAM KURESHI

Developing Fidelity – Ability To Relate To Others And Form Genuine Relationships

Self-schema - a term coined by social psychologist Hazel Markus refers to highly organised knowledge about aspects of one-self formed throughout one's life. These self-schemas can be further elaborated with the sense of self that results from the developmental conflict defined by ego psychologist Erik Erikson as 'identity vs role confusion'. This transitionary period from childhood to adult life may entail confusion and insecurity as individuals start to establish a sense of self when they experiment with various roles, activities, and behaviours.

This ego identity is defined as a fundamental organising principle that develops continuously throughout the lifespan. Moreover, it involves our experiences, relationships, beliefs, values, and memories which constitute the individual's sense of self. Furthermore, this self-image remains fairly consistent even as new aspects are developed over time. It promotes self-sameness/uniqueness, which entails a sense of continuity and a frame of differentiation within the self and in interaction with others respectively as well as psychological development which comprises mental and physical health.

Albeit, role confusion may occur when children are inhibited from exploring and testing out different identities. Which often results in individuals feeling unsure of themselves, their identity, or where they fit. And may lead them to drift from one job or relationship to another with feelings of disappointment and confusion regarding their position in life. While, on the other end of the spectrum those with a strong sense of identity develop values of commitment, self-confidence, independence, and fidelity. As various factors contribute to this including, friends and family, social groups, schoolmates, societal trends, and popular culture. Furthermore, role confusion can have lasting consequences upon an individual's life i.e., difficulties with commitment; instability in mental health and wellbeing; a weak sense of self; or a major lack of confidence.

However, all is not lost as you can strengthen your identity by identifying your values, spending some time with yourself to know yourself better, practicing self-compassion, and becoming skilled at things you enjoy. Additionally, to decrease role confusion you can attempt to work on your strengths, discover what you like by trying new things, making commitments and setting goals, and participating in activities that bring meaning to your life. Finally, you may implement all these solutions and strategies yourself or with the help of a trained professional – as to make sense of your 'self' is to realise your actual potential.

REFERENCES

Bellack, A. S., & Hersen, M. (Eds.). (1998). Comprehensive clinical psychology. Amsterdam, New York: Pergamon.

Cherry, K. (2020, May 9). Understanding self-schema in psychology. Verywell Mind. Retrieved November 21, 2021, from https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-a-self-schema-2795026.

Cherry, K. (2021, June 3). How people develop an identity or cope with role confusion. Verywell Mind. Retrieved November 21, 2021, from https://www.verywellmind.com/identity-versus-confusion-2795735.

Greene, A. (2015). Social Anxiety: Ultimate guide to overcoming fear, shyness, and social phobia to achieve success in all social situations.

Leite, C., & Kuiper, N. A. (2010). Positive and negative self-worth beliefs and evaluative standards. Revista De Psihologie, 56(3-4), 219-230.

Wells, A. (2017). Cognitive therapy of anxiety disorders: A practical guide. John Wiley.