

Mental Health Tips:

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Get Intentional About Your Screen Use

The tension we are experiencing right now with technology is profound. We have never needed it more to connect, to learn and to work, but the lack of separation we have from our screens is negatively impacting our sense of well-being and our ability to concentrate.

So what can we do? Create more boundaries around when we use screens and how. Here are some tips on phone use and social media.

Consider deleting the social media and news apps from your phone. I know, I know it sounds like too much, but you can look at them in your browser and you can always download the apps again easily. Doing this will allow you to be more thoughtful and intentional about when you use them instead of automatically scrolling through without meaning to.

Adjust how you use social media. Part of what's bad about social media for our mental health is how it makes us feel. People often come away from checking social media feeling worse about themselves, and lonelier. What do you want to get out of social media? Take a moment the next time you are scrolling and take note of the feeds that bring you joy, spark creativity and action. Then notice the feeds that make you feel uneasy, sad or lonely. Make the decision to unfollow the feeds that produce those negative feelings. Look for things that will inspire you. A great example provided by Dr. Laurie Santos from Yale University is on twitter she follows #CovidKindness. It helps her to see the good that is happening even when we are being bombarded with all the negative things occurring in the world.

Consider a no screen hour before bed. Find a place to plug your phone preferably a few rooms away from you and leave it there for the night. You can program your phone to allow emergency calls from specific people. Here is a link on how: <http://artoftheiphone.com/2012/09/25/tip-how-to-allow-some-contacts-to-still-call-you-when-the-iphones-do-not-disturb-mode-is-turned-on/>

The relaxation and enjoyment that can come from this is significant and it can greatly improve the quality of your sleep. It can even feel like a brain massage!

How to stick with less screen time. Write down a list and have available non-screen activities that make you feel good. So when you are stressed or bored and would normally reach for your phone you have some other ideas handy. Here are some examples:

Have art supplies out and ready, check out an art supply store in the area for inspiration

Exercise or meditate outside or do an exercise or meditation video

Stretch

Take a walk or hike with or without a friend

Find some fun books or magazines to read non-school related

Listen to a podcast or book

Take a bath

Learn a new skill (ex: wood working, refinishing, ceramics, jewelry making, guitar)

Look into some board games to play with your roommates or family

Tip for this week: Incorporating Mental Hygiene

Many of you should have a sense of your schedule now so it's a great time to plan how to incorporate some important mental hygiene rituals. All of these ideas can improve your overall mental health and your productivity! So ask yourself these questions if you haven't already!

Could I create a schedule where I wake up at the same time every morning? This will help you regulate your sleep and hopefully encourage you to begin going to bed at the same time every night. 7-9 hours is ideal.

At what points during my week could I feasibly get some exercise? Possibly a walk or run outside with good social distancing or an exercise video. Exercising even in short bursts improves your mood, your focus and your overall health. So how could you get yourself just moving more throughout the week?

What time am I putting aside just for homework? Fun fact: most people cannot sit and concentrate for more than a few hours at a time. People are generally more productive when they focus for shorter periods. Decide on a few hours each day, 2-3 hours at most, that will be devoted to getting your work done and make sure you create a space that has limited distractions. Schedule breaks within that time to get up and move your body.

Who do I miss talking to? Call a friend or family member check in on how they are. It's never been a better time to engage in that old school phone call "How are you doing? Really!" Let them know how you are coping and feeling. Try being *unusually honest* you may be surprised how receptive they are and it will probably allow them to open up more too. Find a way to tell people in your life who mean a lot to you that they do and why. They need to hear it and you will feel better having done it.

Am I leaving myself time for just the good stuff?!- Watch some funny videos, engage in an activity that it's just for fun and limit your news intake. Plan something purely enjoyable. This is a heavy time. It can be incredibly helpful to balance that heaviness with some laughter. This is what comedy was made for so indulge in it. It will help you.

Am I open to a two minute ritual before sleep? As you lay down in bed think about a few things you are grateful for, you may even want to write them down. Big or small doesn't matter, just let yourself marinate on those and why you are grateful for them. As you do this take some slow deep breaths.

Try this Savoring Technique

It's easy for us to get wrapped up in our task list and homework assignments. We generally focus on the things that are stressful or worrisome as a way to manage these anxieties. It is hard to focus our attention on what is going well. Here is a short exercise you could do at different points throughout your day that can help remind you of what is pleasurable and good in your life right now.

Savoring:

Think of one moment from this summer that was blissful for you. It could be big or small. Describe it to yourself. What did the scene look like? What were the smells? Who was there? What were the feelings you had then? What are some of the feelings you have now when thinking about it? What made it special for you?

What you just did was an exercise in savoring. Now as you move through your day notice something big or small that is pleasurable for you and talk to yourself about it. If it's difficult to notice something, make a point of inserting a pleasurable activity (remember it could be as simple as enjoying a piece of chocolate) into each day. What feels good about this? Why does it feel special for you? If you are with someone else at the time talk about why it feels good.

Doing this exercise can improve your mood, improve your connections and can begin training your brain to notice positive experiences more easily.

Mental Health Tip: In Suicide Prevention Your Care and Concern is a Powerful Tool

September is National Suicide Prevention Month, and with the COVID-19 pandemic, economic uncertainty, ongoing issues of racial injustice, and the start of the academic year impacting many people's emotional and mental health across the country, we must all be aware of increased mental health challenges including greater risk of suicide.

Suicide is complicated and tragic, but is also often preventable. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for 15-24 year olds in the State of Maine so it is vitally important that warning signs be taken seriously and that individuals are assisted in getting the help and support services they need.

So How Can You Help?

Learn more about warning signs at the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention:

www.afsp.org/risk-factors-and-warning-signs

If you, or someone you care about, is struggling, or you simply have questions, please call **USM Counseling Services** at **207-780-4050** to speak with one of our supportive, trained professional counselors. We are here to help and consultations are private and confidential.

If you are faculty or staff and would like Counseling Services to provide suicide prevention education to your team or class, please email Victoria St. Louis at victoria.e.st@maine.edu for information.

USM Counseling Services offices are open 8:00AM-4:30PM Monday-Friday:

Portland Campus - 96 Falmouth Street, 105 Payson Smith Hall, Portland ME

Contact: (207) 780-4050

Gorham Campus - 156 Upton Hall, Gorham ME

Contact: (207) 780-5411

Lewiston/Auburn Campus - 51 Westminster Street, Lewiston ME

Contact: (207) 780-4050

If you, or someone you are concerned about, is struggling and need to speak with someone, you can also call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

CALL the Lifeline – 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

TEXT – text TALK to 741741

CHAT – www.CrisisChat.org

For information about Suicide Prevention or to get additional resources:

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

Learn the facts at www.afsp.org/learn-the-facts

Get Resources at www.afsp.org/resources

The Trevor Project (LGBTQ Suicide & Crisis Services)

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/>

Call – 1-866-488-7386

#YouAreNotAlone #YouWillBeFound #KeepGoing