ANXIETY AND ATTENTION MANAGEMENT FOR STUDENTS WITH ADHD, LEARNING DISABILITIES AND ANXIETY DURING COVID-19

As an individual with ADHD, LD or anxiety the Shelter in Place and Social Distancing requirements can be especially anxiety producing. You’ve come to rely on strategies for managing yourself in ways that may no longer be possible. Remember that where and how you set up your environment are important to helping you stay focused. The Schwab Learning Center is still here for you through remote and virtual support! Here are some tips designed especially for you:

Accept that life will be different for the foreseeable future. Know that there are a lot of things out of your control, and that flexibility will continue to be required. Focus your energy and attention on the things you can control, such as your attitude toward these adjustments and news ways to help yourself.

Create a new routine. Developing rhythms of rest, exercise, work time, recreation time, and connection time can create a sense of stability and make us more productive.

- Build in intentional breaks to move your body, change tasks, and rest from screen time throughout your day.
- Prepare healthy snacks for the day as soon as you wake up, so that you don’t spend too long away from your work when you take a break.
- Make extra time for self-care. Remember basic healthy coping strategies such as spending time outside with social distancing, exercising, getting enough sleep, eating regularly and staying hydrated.
- Put all resources you’ll need out the night before, for the work you have scheduled: printer paper, pencils, calculator, highlighters, notecards, etc.
- Leave your study space clear and ready to go!
Develop goals. Think about the plans you had that you can still accomplish, perhaps with some adjustments. Identify the new opportunities to do interesting things you didn’t expect.

- Reach out to people who are involved with your goals so that you can continue to work toward them or come up with a new timeline. This will help you feel more in control and reduce anxiety of the unknown. If you can’t get the answers you need, set a date for a future “check in” to give you something to count on.
- Keep an electronic calendar and color code it for academic work, personal time and other appointments such as medical, tutoring or time to meet with your learning specialist.
- When something pops into your mind, go to your calendar immediately and insert in a place where you can work on it. Once you write it down, you won’t worry about forgetting something important.

Keep clear priorities. We can get overwhelmed by all the things that we feel like we could or should be doing. Make it easier on yourself by focusing on one thing at a time.

- Make a list the night before of everything that you need to complete the next day. Number and list them in order of priority.
- Estimate how long each one will take and revise your schedule if you don’t have enough time.
- If you start to become anxious about schoolwork, stay calm and email your professor to discuss how you can approach your work differently. Perhaps there are online resources or a TA who can help you.

Create a healthy and happy study environment designed to help you focus. Structure can help create a sense of control and safety for your well-being.

- Turn your chair or desk so that you face yourself away from distractions, with the flow of traffic behind you.
- Set a timer so that you work for 25 minutes on and 5 minutes off. At the end of 25 minutes write down what you’ve accomplished and stretch, have a snack, or talk a short exercise break.
- Wear ear plugs or a noise cancelling headset.

Resources at Stanford are still going strong! Reach out to us at the Schwab Learning Center!

- Cultivate a positive outlook. Develop a “learner’s mindset” about the challenges you are facing. What do they teach you about your values, your coping strategies, and your relationships? How can you learn as much as possible from this situation?
Remember that you have made it through challenges in the past and think about the internal resources and the support systems that helped you get through them. Identifying the coping strategies that you already have and how you can activate them in your present situation. Reach out to your SLC Learning Specialist: Aillie, Rosinel, Kathryn, Nicole or Michelle are here for you.

Be grateful, self-aware and attend to hopeful messages: Intentionally seek outposts and people that bring you hope. Spend time each day identifying things for which you feel grateful.

- Do not assume the worst. It is easy to focus on crisis scenarios, especially when those around us are panicking. However, keep in mind that the worst case is only one outcome among many possibilities.
- Be careful that “social distancing” doesn’t turn into “social isolation.” The goal is to reduce contact between large numbers of people - but isolation can have a negative impact on mental health.
- Develop ways to stay connected to your support system. Take advantage of online resources to chat and enjoy time with friends and family remotely.
- Stay aware of those around you and take the initiative to reach out to others. Remember especially those who are most vulnerable to illness or stress; offering mutual support can be good for you as well as for them.
- Times of higher stress require us to be more intentional about taking care of ourselves. Notice when you are feeling anxious, and take small steps to regulate yourself, such as: Feel your feet on the ground. Notice wherever your body is in contact with something supported. If it feels difficult to notice points of grounding, use hands to create intentional points of pressure (e.g. gently squeeze the forearms, upper arm and shoulders).
- Find the rhythm of your breath. First just noticing the inhale, the exhale and the pause between breaths. If there is tightness in the chest, stay with noticing. Take a deep breath in, as if you were smelling a delicious flower. Slowly exhale, as if you were blowing out a candle. Calming your breath can interrupt the physiological spiral of anxiety.

Read more about coping with anxiety related to Covid-19:
- Latest Stanford Information About COVID-19
- Coping and Staying Well During School Closures
- Science Based Strategies to Cope with Coronavirus Anxiety
- Mental Health and Coping from CDC