

Self-Isolation Strategies for Graduate Students

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in significant changes and added new stressors for Graduate Students. Working under these conditions is challenging and it is normal to feel heightened anxiety during this time, but it's important to have strategies and resources to help manage the situation.

If you are struggling with motivation, try some of the tips below. If you are struggling with your Mental Health, please use the information below to access supports.

Create a suitable, designated workspace.

- Well-lit space with a comfortable chair and desk, if possible.
- Use the space for schoolwork only; not your bedroom, if possible.
- If your workspace isn't ideal, try using noise cancelling headphones or listen to instrumental music to reduce auditory distractions.

Get in the right mindset.

- Try getting dressed as if you were going to class, meet with your supervisor, or teach – get up and go through your usual morning routine before sitting down to work.
- Reduce clutter and distractions from your workspace.
- Set your phone on DND or use an internet blocker (e.g., Stayfocusd, Limit, WasteNoTime, LeechBlock, Forest, or Pause.).

Create a routine.

- Try to be consistent with your waking and sleeping hours.
- Set specific days/times for specific ongoing tasks. For example, schedule your course work for Mondays and Wednesdays, your TA responsibilities for Tuesdays and Thursdays, and use Fridays and Saturdays for your own research.
- Schedule consistent times for “attending” online classes. If recorded lectures are long, try breaking them into shorter chunks for listening.

Establish goals.

- Try setting 2-3 daily personal goals (e.g., go for a walk, do laundry) as well as your academic goals.
- Set SMART goals.
 - Specific: Choose a specific task to complete. (e.g., find 5 academic sources; create an outline for a paper or thesis chapter; format 10 references)
 - Masurable: Make sure you will know when your goal is complete – avoid unmeasurables like “work on thesis” or “read”
 - Achievable: Make sure the task can be completed with the resources/time you have.
 - Reasonable: Is the goal too large, complex, or overwhelming? Do you need to break it down into smaller parts?
 - Time-sensitive: Set a certain deadline by which this goal needs to be completed.

Track and celebrate your progress.

- Cross things off a to do list or put check marks on your calendar.
- Post your goals and accomplishments online. Let people know you are working on goals and would like some encouragement.
- Think of some rewards for when you accomplish what you want to do.

Connect with others.

- Physical distance doesn't have to mean social isolation – reach out to friends, peers, colleagues, and family by phone or through Skype, FaceTime, Zoom, MS Teams, or LifeSize.
- Discuss expectations with your supervisor.
- Meet online with your classmates to discuss course content.
- Connect with other graduate students to share strategies and build a learning community.

Self-Care.

- Try to get outside, especially if the sun is shining. Vitamin D from the sun can have a positive effect on your mood.
- Make time for things you enjoy. Try something creative like play music, draw, paint, knit, or sew, or watch a movie, garden, cook, bake, etc.
- Exercise daily to improve focus and concentration. Simply walking up and down a flight of stairs several times to increase your heartrate will be enough.
- Try meditation and relaxation to relieve stress.
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xDyPcJrl0c>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZToicYcHI0U>
- Make an effort to eat well, stay hydrated, and get a full night's sleep.
- Set limits on the amount of news you access and make sure it's from reputable sources.
- Notice and accept that there are a lot of things that are out of our control at this time. Acknowledging and naming feelings, along with focusing on what you can do in response to these feelings can support self-acceptance and reduce stress and worry.

Reach out for support when needed.

- If you're struggling with mental health issues, support is available:
 - Personal Counselling (Morneau Shepell for Brock University): 1-833-276-2533
 - Student Health Services: 905-688-5550 x3243
 - Good 2 Talk (Ontario): 1-866-925-5454
 - Crisis Outreach and Support Team (COAST) Niagara: 1-866-550-5205 extension 1
- If you are experiencing heightened anxiety due to COVID-19, virusanxiety.com offers specific tips for coping with anxiety and depression related to COVID-19.