

Studying when Distracted

Stressful life events or crises understandably impact on your emotional and mental state and thus your ability to focus as usual on your study. However, no matter how compelling the situation is, usually it will not require your attention all the time. It is important to acknowledge and remember other areas of your life that need time and attention such as your health, maintaining your relationships and your study. Focusing on these other important areas also has the advantage of helping you manage the stressful situation you are in because it allows you to reduce total preoccupation with the event or crisis.

Strategies

Here are some strategies that will help you to focus back on your study and deal with the stressful situation you are experiencing.

Goal setting

- Don't let yourself be overwhelmed by the big picture and the amount of work you need to do. Set yourself specific and reachable goals for each study period. Make sure each goal is small and realistic. For example, "In the next half hour I will go to the library and photocopy some material". In the next hour I will read the first chapter of this text book and make a summary" or even, "for 10 minutes I will write down what I know about topic x".

Shorter study periods

- Make your study periods shorter and have more frequent breaks. It is understandable that you may not concentrate as well whilst you are feeling so upset, so by shortening your study time you are placing less demand on yourself but still making some progress on your important study goals. It is important to stick to your study goal. If you get distracted, gently bring your mind back to the goal. You are training your mind to stay focused.

Active learning

- Be active in the learning process. For example, write notes as you read; talk out loud about what you are learning; or talk to fellow students, friends or family about the material.

Peak concentration times

- Be conscious of the times of the day that you are able to concentrate better and use these times for more complex material. You can set yourself more routine tasks (e.g. getting resources from the library) at other times of the day.

Regular attendance

- Encourage yourself to attend all lectures, tutorials and pracs. Even though this might be an effort, it is a structured learning time.

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Worry time

- Give yourself time to think about the stressful situation or crisis. Schedule a time each day or a couple of times a day to process or have “worry time”. Some people find it helpful to write down their feelings and thoughts and/or make a list of things they need to do.

Time out

- Ask yourself whether you are letting yourself be pre-occupied and totally caught up with what is happening? Maybe you need to limit the amount of time you talk to others about the event – sometimes constantly talking about it can keep the situation going around in your mind without any useful outcome.

Balanced time

- Give time to other parts of your life that are important, such as a healthy diet, time out for relaxation, time with family and friends, exercise, spiritual reflection.

Own resources

- Think about how you have handled stressful and distressing situations in the past. What got you through? What are the personal resources you have that helped? For example, courage, loyalty, determination.

If you are not attending counselling you may want to consider making an appointment to talk over your situation. The Counsellors are usually available to see you at short notice.

For further free information and support contact UNE Student Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS):

Phone: 02 6773 2897 for an appointment

Email: studentcounselling@une.edu.au or via [AskUNE](#)

<http://www.une.edu.au/current-students/support/student-support/counselling>

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