

Student Success and Wellbeing

Tip Sheet

University can be an exciting time where you get to learn things that interest you, get involved in new activities, meet new people, and work towards your goals. However, it can also be very stressful with up to 83% of Australian university students experiencing psychological distress.

What is resilience?

Resilience is the ability to cope with stressful or challenging situations. Developing resilience doesn't mean you won't experience stress, disappointment or stop negative things from happening in your life. However, resilience will help you cope and bounce back when stressful things do happen, whether that is not doing as well on an exam as you might have liked, having your bus arrive late, life events such as a relationship breakdown, serious illness, loss of someone you love or changes in your living situation.

Everyone can be resilient

Resilience isn't a personality trait – it is a set of strategies for approaching life and its inherent challenges that result in successful adaptation, happiness and wellbeing.



Building Blocks

There are six building blocks that help enhance the resilience of university students. The first three provide a buffer against stress. They are:

- Realistic expectations
- Balance
- Connectedness

The second three are skills that you use to help you better manage

problems and stressors when they arise. They are:

- Positive self-talk
- Managing stress
- Taking action

Realistic Expectations

While having goals and wanting to do well are important components of success, having unrealistic and unachievable expectations of yourself and others sets you up for failure and distress.

Here are some tips to keeping your expectations achievable:

- Be aware of and accept your reality just the way it is not how you think it should be, must be, or could be; just the way it is.
- Have goals (both short term and long term) so that you have something to aim for.
- Make decisions that help you work towards your goals
- Stay flexible so that when things don't go the way you had hoped or liked, you can be creative and work around them.
- Use your own innovation and creativity.
- Avoid tying your performance/achievement to how you feel about yourself.
- Learn from things that don't go as well as you hoped.
- Do small, daily, achievable tasks that help you work towards your goals.

It is okay to want to be a good student; to want to be a perfect student is setting yourself up for failure – it doesn't exist.

Balance

Another protective factor for students is having a balanced lifestyle. Being involved in a range of activities enables you to have multiple sources of accomplishment and enjoyment. For example: work, family, hobbies and sports. If you experience disappointment in one area, the other areas help you maintain a sense of perspective. If being a student is your entire focus, then when faced with disappointment it can seem like your entire world has collapsed.

Remember balance includes:

- Being involved in multiple activities.
- Taking care of your physical needs including sleep, nutrition, exercise and relaxation.



Connectedness

It is important to feel included and validated by others around us in all spheres of our lives. Being connected is the single biggest predictor of student wellbeing.

Communicating effectively can help you get and maintain connectedness with a wide range of people in your life. That can be difficult when you are in a conflict situation, a new situation or even one that you are

feeling a bit anxious about. Here are some strategies to help it go well:

- Identify the purpose.
- Use resourceful communication including, not losing your cool, remaining dignified and not making the other person defensive.
- Negotiate and compromise to achieve a mutually satisfying solution.
- Address problems immediately, which may help prevent a build up of negative feelings.

Positive Self-Talk

Feelings are influenced by the things you say and think to yourself. When you interpret most things as being a reflection on you, you are more likely to feel depressed, angry, or anxious. You can change how you feel by changing your thinking. Some tips to help are:

- Celebrate successes, no matter how small
- Interpret negative feedback as a response to what you did, NOT who you are
- Think about what you would say to a friend in the same situation
- Use positive self-talk to get through difficult situations (e.g. *this is scary but I can get through it – I'll never be able to if I don't give it a try*).

Managing Stress

Feelings and emotions can be scary sometimes because we think we may lose control or that we must be a bad person if we have negative emotions. Experiencing the full spectrum of emotion is part of the normal ups and downs of life.

It is important you are able to recognise and accept your own emotions. It is also important to be able to manage emotions resourcefully (e.g. words, actions, who to share with, frequency and quantity of information).

Coping skills are a set of tools that help you get through tough times. These may include:

- Staying focussed in the moment.
- Positive self-talk.
- Challenging unhelpful thoughts.

- Involvement in activities that you enjoy and experience success.
- Doing things that you find relaxing.
- Having a routine that works for you and sticking to it as much as possible.
- Asking for help and support whenever necessary.

Taking Action

Sometimes difficult situations can be paralysing. You may hope that if you do nothing they will just go away. Though, often that doesn't help and the problem may get worse or cause you a lot of distress before you finally take action.

All problems can be solved. Sometimes there is not a 'perfect solution', but being flexible can help in finding creative and innovative solutions to move forward.

The steps of problem-solving are:

- Define the problem.
- Generate lots of alternative solutions (without judging them).
- Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of each option.
- Choose the solution/s that you think will work best.
- Put it into action.
- Review how it went and revise if necessary.

University Resources

Sometimes it is hard to solve a problem on your own, especially if it is a situation that is emotionally charged or one that you don't have a lot of experience dealing with.

The university has a wealth of support services to help students both with academic and personal challenges they may face.

It can be a bit daunting to ask for help when you are not sure what to expect or who the right person is to approach. It doesn't matter if the first person you contact for help isn't the person who can best help you – they can direct you to the right person. Useful places to start are:

- Your school or faculty office staff
- Lecturers and tutors
- Course coordinators

- Library staff
- Student Support Services (Counselling, Health and Medical Centre, International Student Services, Careers & Employment)
- Student Guild
- Disability Services
- Equity

All services have a webpage on the university website with their contact details.



Take Home Messages

- **Resilience leads to success and wellbeing**
- **Aim for success not perfection**
- **Maintain balance in your life**
- **Find ways of staying connected in all aspects of your life**
- **Be kind to yourself**
- **Have some strategies to cope with stress**
- **Take action and solve problems early**
- **Access help whenever needed**

FOR FURTHER HELP If you need further assistance please contact the **University Health Service** on
3365 6210 (**St Lucia**)
3381 1210 (**Ipswich**)
5460 1396 (**Gatton**)

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