

## Assessing/Strengthening Learning Skills

- What do you do to make course information MANAGEABLE and MEANINGFUL?
- Some considerations for being well prepared for the test:
  - Structuring information *versus* “dumping” information/memorizing individual bits of information
  - Learning day by day *versus* learning for the test/exam
  - Using logic, examples, making connections *versus* rote memory
  - Planning for school and breaks *versus* being a 24/7 student
  - Including as much self-testing in your review as possible

## Monitoring/Changing Self Talk

- Different types of self-talk to watch for:
  - All or Nothing Thinking – “If I don’t understand everything, I will do poorly.”
  - Overgeneralizations – “Now I’ll never succeed.”, “My school year is ruined.”
  - Self-Criticism or Condemnation – “How could I have been so stupid.”
  - Comparisons with Others – “Everyone else understands this, why can’t I?”
- What are you saying to yourself? Is it helping or hurting?:
  - Our level of anxiety is a reflection of our self-talk. Saying, “This exam is going to be brutal!”, “What if I fail!”, “I need to do well” will likely increase anxiety.
  - It is hard to control self-talk if you’re not aware of it. Start listening to yourself and ask, “Would I say this to someone I care about?” If the answer is no, work on thought stopping and replacing your negative self-talk with something more supportive.

## Managing the Physical Symptoms of Anxiety

- Test anxiety is more likely to occur if the physical symptoms of anxiety build to the point where they feel “normal”. That is, you “forget” what it feels like to be truly calm and relaxed. Remind yourself DAILY what it feels like to be relaxed.
- Here are a few relaxation techniques:
  - **Deep Breathing Exercises** - A quick way of capturing a feeling of calm and decreasing your anxiety is to take some slow, deep breaths. Do this about 5 or 6 times, and then resume normal breathing.
  - **Muscle Relaxation** - Engage in muscle relaxation techniques on a regular basis. Without this reminder, you may start to perceive tense muscles as “normal”. Muscle relaxation involves tightening your muscles and then relaxing them. The contrast between the tense and relaxed states helps to increase awareness of anxiety and provide a sense of control over these responses.
  - **Exercise** - When humans experience stress, especially if the stressor is perceived as threatening, we are biologically equipped to “fight” the stressor or “flee”. The perception of a threat results in a surge of energy so that we can respond to the challenge. This works well when threatening stressors are wild animals but what happens when they are exams? Exercise allows us to channel some of the pent-up physical energy in a constructive way.
  - **Maintain Stress Busters** - Eat properly, take breaks, get adequate sleep ESPECIALLY during exams.

## Other Ways of Managing Anxiety

- **Before the test:**
  - As you anticipate the exam, think positively, eg. “I can do OK on this exam. I’ve studied and know my stuff.”
  - Before you go to bed on the night before the exam, organize anything that you will need for the exam – pen, pencil, ruler, eraser, calculator etc. Double check the time of the exam and the location.
  - Set the alarm clock and then get a good night’s sleep before the exam.
- **Immediately before the test:**
  - Don’t arrive so early that you have to wait around for a long time
  - Don’t discuss content with other students just before the exam
  - Avoid highly anxious peers
  - Choose a seat with minimal distractions (eg. not by the door)
  - Focus on positive confidence boosting thoughts
- **During the test:**
  - If tense, take some deep breaths/stretch your legs and arms
  - Keep your attention on the test and on the present
  - Concentrate on yourself, not on what others are doing
  - Keep moving through the questions
  - Pace yourself but don’t over focus on time; assess pace half way through
  - Focus on what you know rather than dwelling on what you don’t
- **After the test:**
  - When the exam is over, treat yourself! If you don’t have any other commitments, maybe you can take the night off. If you have to study for other exams you may have to postpone a larger break, but a brief break may be the “pick up” that you need.

## Managing Stress Through Test/Exam Time

- **Journalling** - Journaling allows you to become more reflective about the things in your life that mean the most to you. Journaling can involve writing for 15-20 minutes, or it may be 1 or 2 quick sentences reflecting what you are grateful for that day. Some starters include:  
*One thing I did well today was.... I am grateful for...*
- **Calming Music** - Music can transport the mind and body away from the everyday. Students experiencing stress and anxiety can often benefit from calm and relaxing music.
  - Play music that you find calming for 5 minutes prior to doing school work. Sit or lie still.
  - Download a calming song to listen to prior to a test or presentation. This helps to decrease anxiety while also blocking out the distractions that are present outside a busy lecture hall.
- **Meditation** – Meditation is an activity where you devote time to focusing on just one thing. Most of our time is consumed with numerous busy thoughts and many distractions. Meditation transports you to a place free of all of these distractions and worries. Check out YouTube for helpful meditation videos.
- **Reach out to others** - Reach out and talk to friends and family or book an appointment with Learning Development & Success or Mental Health Support to speak to a counsellor regarding your stress or anxiety.