

# Struggling with mental health during Covid

## Tips to cope with stress



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## Highlights:

- More than half of students responding to a global survey say that COVID has left them struggling with mental health
- Reports of mental health issues differ substantially between countries with important implications for international educators
- International students face unique challenges as a result of the pandemic and may also be more hesitant about asking for help when suffering from a mental health crisis
- Strengthening mental wellness support for international students will be incredibly important this year and next

(Survey by Chegg, in October/November 2020 to students between 18 and 21 years old).

The diverging self-reports of mental health or lack thereof across the survey sample suggest that **there is a cultural dimension** to how students assess their mental health and whether they feel able to reach out for help if they are experiencing **anxiety**, **depression**, substantial **anger** or other mental health challenges related to being separated from loved ones, feel the loss of freedom, uncertainty over disease status or boredom, (boredom can, on occasion, create dramatic effects).

This is of special importance for international educators in terms of the quality and quantity of mental health counselling they provide for students - particularly since other research confirms that many international students are less likely to both be aware of and access mental health support than domestic students are.

What behaviors and signs one should look out for that might suggest that a student is having trouble

- Deterioration in personal hygiene or dress
- Dramatic weight loss or gain
- Noticeable changes in mood
- Excessive absences
- Academic problems
- Social isolation
- Unusual behaviors
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Threat of harm to themselves or others

Is very importante reassuring students that accessing support is a **strong** rather than a weak action!

## COVID has heightened a sense of isolation/ loneliness

Another 2020 survey (university of Hong Kong) assessed international students' mental health in the pandemic and it interestingly segmented student respondents into **those who stayed in the host country** when COVID hit and **those who returned home**. The research found that **84% of all students** in the sample **faced "moderate-to-high" levels of stress** but that students who remained in the host country "...had significantly higher stress from COVID-19 related stressors such as personal health and lack of social support, higher perceived stress, and more severe insomnia symptoms".

the quickly changing, sometimes contradictory, **often alarming messages that all students were subject to** during the first months of COVID would have been particularly distressing for international students far from home, away from their families. These students might have had **language barriers** and many would have also been navigating complicated questions about whether to stay or leave: (find a flight to chances to completing their programmes, financial struggles).

## Tips to cope with stress

- **Talk with someone**. Share what you're feeling always help
- **Establish a routine for practice some kind of physical activity every day / week** and don't skip it
- Write down a list of your troubles, and next to it: write the possible options and solutions
- **Try some relaxation techniques** (meditation, yoga, mindfulness, pray)
- **Take care of yourself** (do something that pleases you, just for the sake of it)
- **Avoid or at least reduce the consumption of caffeine, alcohol and nicotine** (drink a lot of water, herb tea and fruit juice mixed with water)
- **Take control of the things you can, let go the ones you don't: (easier say than do!)** Keep faith (in yourself; in humankind; trust that everything has a purpose even if you can't see what it is)
- **Every now and then do something new** (try a different food, go for a dance class, read a new literary genre)
- **Break routine** (once and a while: go for a walk; go by the sea and sit down looking the ocean, go have a coffee with friend, etc.)

### Acordos Tolteques

- **Do the best you can in all situations**
- **Don't suppose**
- **Don't take things personal**
- **Honor your words**