

Space, time and relationships during lockdown

One of the major stresses during lockdown is that many of our students have to study within small confined spaces. Sometimes those spaces have to be shared with the rest of the family. Whether back at home with your family, in a small house, or in residence we suggest how and why you need to take control of the more or lesser resources you may have both in terms of space, time and relationships.

1. Organising your space for study

- Take some time to divide your existing space for different activities.
- Delineate a space you use for sleep purposes only, a place where you cook food and eat, and a space where you study. Even if this is a shared space, decide where to do what and when.
- No matter how small those spaces, you need to cultivate discipline, routine, and rules you make for yourself.
- This way the Mind (that jumps around all the time) will have clear and established boundary that help regulate its behaviour. It will learn to be in a study “zone” when you sit at your desk to study; or to get drowsy and fall asleep when in bed.
- When you are clear with what you want your mind will cooperate and you don’t want your mind to sabotage you! Many of us have learned this the hard way.
- When you decide to start studying, go through a routine (e.g. eat, shower, and dress appropriately).
- Do not switch on your laptop or tablet while you remain in bed in your pyjamas, eating half a sandwich from last night.
- When you dress professionally you act professionally, your behaviour changes, as well as your expectations of yourself and others.
- Your efforts begin to show because you feel better, you are more motivated, and you mean business!

2. Negotiate time for study

This is a tricky one for those living in small spaces that need to be shared. Noise pollution in certain areas makes it difficult for people to work and focus for long hours especially during the day. Ear plugs, ear phones may help a little.

A student of mine told me a few years back he could only study at night due to high levels of noise in his neighbourhood. You may find that when others sleep, e.g. very early mornings, is better for self-study.

- Make a schedule that is suitable for you;
- Organise your study session/s and stick with it!

- Don't wait for inspiration to start; the mood you are waiting for is a result of practice! Actors work on their craft every day, musicians practice their skill every day, writers write every day. What is hard is to sit down and do it!

3. Negotiate relationships

It may be hard for others, even your immediate family to understand and share your long term goals and determination. They may not realise how important it is to be consistent in your work when you are a university student. Here are some tips for students to share their study needs with their family.

Share positively

- Start with affirming their positive role in your life (e.g. how supportive they have been in the past; how thankful you are for their supportive efforts, etc.).
- Share what motivates and inspires you.

Prepare

- Talk about what will change for a short time due to your need to study at home, e.g. have your own time and space.
- They may not share your goals but may agree on some aspects.
- Find what you can mutually agree on.

Negotiate roles and schedules

- Your family roles may need to be renegotiated during this time to reduce conflicting demands. E.g. some family members may think if you are at home you can now do all sorts of chores.

Listening

- In your discussion don't focus exclusively on your needs
- Ensure you listen to their needs also (lockdown does things to other people too!)
- Sometimes listening is all that is needed

Celebrate

- Remember to celebrate small victories: yours and others!
- Keep people that can affirm and validate you close by (you need it!).
- Take a break and renew your spirit!

REMEMBER

- If you change your attitude, you can attain most any goal you set when you plan your steps wisely...

- Goals that may have seemed far away and out of reach eventually move closer and become attainable...
- When you list your goals you build your self-image...
- You see yourself as worthy of these goals...
- You develop the traits and personality that allow you to reach them...

Reference: Paul J. Meyer's "Attitude Is Everything"

General tips to manage your wellness during lockdown:

Your mental health is as important as your physical health for your success in the future. Just as you wash your hands to protect yourself from the Covid 19 virus, there are mental hygiene activities that you could apply to protect your mental health.

- **Self-Compassion:** Remind yourself that you are not alone; the whole of humanity is confronted with uncertainty and change currently. It is quite normal to be anxious. Acknowledge your feelings. Guard against being too harsh on yourself, rather opt for kindness.
- Different strategies work for different people. Find what works for you. For example a very strict and structured routine works well for some and for the more unstructured amongst us a different approach would work better.
- **Grounding:** Experiment with different ways to ground yourself during this time. Often doing things that delights your senses are helpful. Perhaps you have a favourite smell that you can surround yourself with or conjure up in your mind. Perhaps a favourite texture such as a soft blanket will be comforting. Seek what delights your senses. Connecting with nature in any way possible is also very calming and helpful.
- **Habitual de-stressing:** Create a daily habit of becoming still for a moment, de-stressing and centering yourself. There are many guided meditation, visualisation, mindfulness, progressive relaxation and breath-work resources available on the internet to assist you.
- **Connect with others:** now is not the time to isolate yourself. Check in with friends and family and use the technology available to you to engage with people that are good for your soul. Similarly, avoid watching too much news, engaging with people that upsets you and participating in detrimental conversations on social media platforms.
- **"Other" focus:** Think of ways to assist others. This may be by helping a fellow student to understand difficult work, or merely by having a kind word for those you are in contact with.
- **Gratefulness** goes a long way in helping us to maintain perspective. Many students are living in very harsh conditions currently. No matter what your circumstances are, there is also an abundance of free resources to you – it might fresh air, sunshine, free will to

choose or many other things. Take time daily to reflect on what is available to you and what you are grateful for.

- Reach out. If you need to speak to a psychologist contact the Centre for Student Counselling and Development at supportus@sun.ac.za. A staff member will be asked to contact you. We are more than happy to assist you. Also remember that in the event of a crisis ER24 (010 205 3032) is also available to you, free of charge, day and night. Reaching out is evidence of courage and strength and not weakness.

May you continue to take care of your mental well-being with as much vigilance as protecting yourself against the Corona virus.