



Scholars
Program



TOP 10 TIPS

TO PROMOTE AND PROTECT WELLNESS

A Resource for Scholars



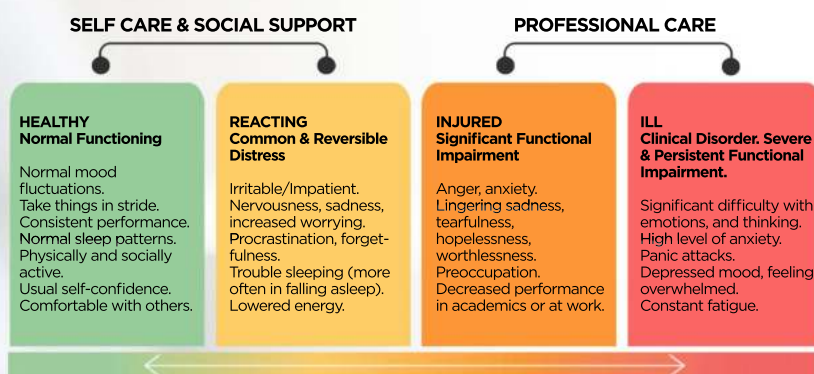
The journey you are on with the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program is likely to be both exciting and challenging, and we have got a few tips to help navigate it.



1. Mental Health is important and relevant to us all

Mental health is important to us all, and is not just referring to mental illness. Mental health can often be seen as on a continuum, ranging from optimum mental health to poor mental health. Our mental health can fluctuate depending on what is going on around us. Life events, stressors, and the ways we cope can move us up or down the continuum at any time. Understanding mental health this way can be helpful as we can then strive to maintain and improve our mental health across our lifetime.

The Mental Health Continuum Model



It may help to reflect on and consider your mental health as you continue your journey with the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program. Being proactive in self-reflection and making small changes where necessary, can help protect and promote our mental health.

Where do you think you are right now on the mental health continuum?

What might you be able to do to move it one step towards more positive mental health?



2. Stressful events are expected

Stress is a state of worry or mental pressure caused by a difficult situation. Stress is a natural human response that helps us to address challenges or threats in our lives.

When we experience stress, we may feel irritable, anxious, have trouble sleeping or concentrating, lose our appetite, or eat more than usual. We may also experience physical symptoms like headaches, or stomach aches.

It is natural to feel stressed in challenging situations like a job interview or exam, when you have a high workload or are facing lots of deadlines, experiencing financial problems, or conflict with friends or family. Chances are that starting university and being in a new environment with new experiences, and potentially exposure to different cultures, will be overwhelming at some point. Be mindful that these changes may add to your stress, or you may find yourself away from some of the coping strategies you used to rely on.

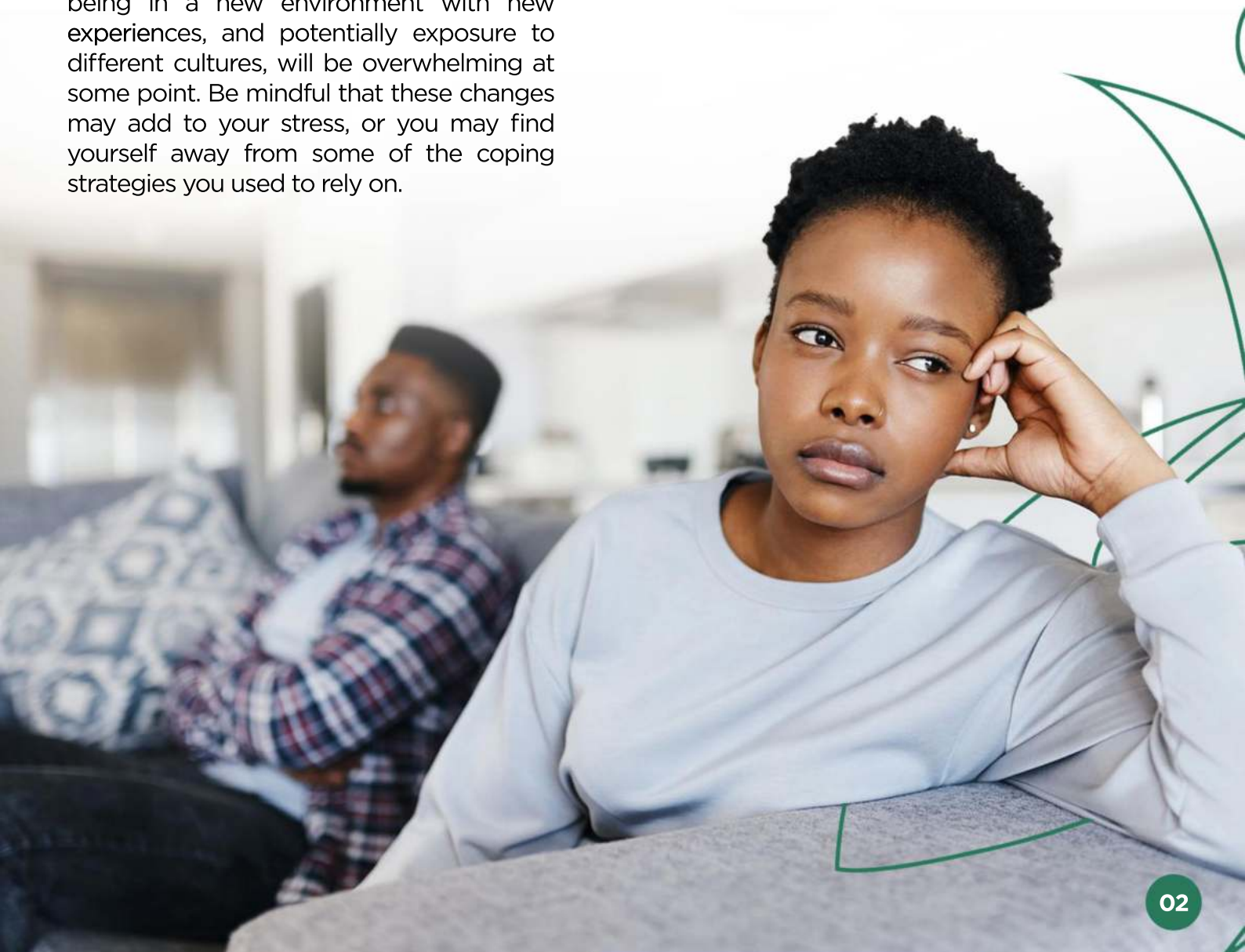
How we deal with stress often differs from person to person. Learning how to cope with and manage stress in healthy ways is an important skill. Remember that it is okay to ask for help at these times, or seek out additional resources to strengthen the ones you already have: the more tools you are able to develop during your journey, the more resources you have that can strengthen your resilience when faced with challenges or setbacks.

What are your biggest stressors right now?

What are some of the ways you manage and cope with the stress you experience?

What skills related to stress management would you like to develop or strengthen?

Where could you start having that conversation?





3. Wellness falls across many domains

Wellness is a holistic approach to health that encompasses physical, mental, emotional, and social aspects of a person's life. It emphasizes prevention and self-care over treating illnesses or disorders as they develop. Wellness aims to achieve peak levels of physical and mental performance across eight dimensions: emotional, occupational, spiritual, physical, intellectual, environmental, and financial. Each dimension complements the other, and no dimension is better than the other. The goal is to create a balance in life.

We have developed some resources to explore the idea of wellness further. We encourage you to log on to the Baobab Platform to read more about the [Wellness Wheel resources](#). Promoting wellness is something we can all do from day one so that we are in a good place to deal with any upcoming challenges.

Which areas of wellness are you currently promoting well?

Which areas of wellness might you be neglecting?



4. Explore how best to look after yourself

Self-care is about taking care of our mental, emotional, and physical health. Attending to our health and wellbeing and making self-care a priority can help lower stress, prevent burnout, and enhance happiness and overall quality of life. Practicing self-care is one way of looking after and promoting good mental health. Check out this [self assessment](#) form if you are interested to explore more.

The list of possible self-care activities is long and includes many things. See if you can find time to do things just for yourself: things that bring you joy, inner peace, or contentment. Finding a few ways to practice self-care that work for you is the ultimate goal - everyone is different and different things will work for different people. You might like to try journaling, creating art, exercising, playing sports, eating well, listening to music, singing, watching movies, baking or cooking, sleeping, practicing meditation, taking a walk in nature, or spending time with loved ones. Visit the Baobab Platform to [check out the courses on self-care](#).

Self-care can sometimes feel over-indulgent or even selfish. Remember that replenishing or charging your own 'battery' can help you to be more productive, continue supporting others, and be the best version of yourself.



What does your battery look like today?

How do you look after yourself when you are feeling stressed, or overwhelmed?

Take time to recognize the signs and levels of stress you may be experiencing as well as recovery tools or approaches you can use for yourself.

What self-care activities work for you?



5. Find balance

As you start university and progress with your scholarship, you are likely to face many different demands competing for your time and energy. Being part of the scholars' community can come with some pressure to 'do it all'. It can be helpful to think about balance in different areas of your life.

Try to find a balance between academic success and performance and your wellbeing. It's likely that you have been chosen for the scholarship because of your ambition and success, and you will want to do your best. It is not a failure if you're going through something difficult and it is important to take care of yourself, and prioritize your health and mental health and wellbeing. Give yourself grace and allow yourself to move at your own pace. Don't forget how important rest is to re-charge, and it will also boost your productivity and creativity.

It can also help to find a balance between your studies and other responsibilities you might have like family. You will probably find you have competing demands on your finances as well. Visit the Baobab Platform to check out the courses on [managing finances: Financial Literacy 101: Budgeting & Budgeting for the Real World.](#)

If things feel difficult, it can also help to take time to notice two or three small positive things each day. This doesn't take away the challenges, but helps to balance things out and give some perspective.

And remember, you don't need to figure all of this out on your own. It's actually expected not to know how to balance everything from the get go. Reach out to your trusted peers, alumni or resource persons on campus or on platforms such as the Baobab platform. Part of the student journey also relies on you gaining strength from your interactions with others.

Are there any areas of your life that feel a bit out of balance?

What things do you prioritize and what things do you tend to neglect?

Who are the resource persons you can identify on campus to bounce ideas off and ask questions related to finding balance?



6. Connect with kindness and self-compassion

Self-compassion is turning compassion inwards and being kind and understanding to ourselves when challenges and difficulties arise, rather than harsh or self-critical. For example, when we make mistakes, are feeling down, inadequate, or worrying we can try to respond compassionately by giving ourselves support and encouragement. One way of looking at it is to give ourselves the same kindness and support as we might give to a good friend. Self-compassion is a source of resilience and coping and can help us find new ways to respond to challenges.

Press the pause button when you hear yourself being critical or harsh to yourself. Would you use the same words you use to yourself to a friend or family member? See if you can try to grow the part of you that can respond compassionately. Try this experience: Compare times when you **heard negative self-talk** with times when you have been encouraging towards yourself even when facing a setback. Which self-talk leaves you with more energy and a wider vision to move forward? Which self-talk provides you with encouraging insights and a non-stigmatizing approach to seeking other resources?





7. Increase your self-awareness

Self-awareness is an important skill for everyone, and can be an important part of university life as you develop a sense of who you are and your place in the world. Self-awareness is the ability to evaluate your strengths and weaknesses. It is the ability to reflect on yourself, and recognize and understand how your thoughts, emotions, and actions influence your behavior, as well as others.

If you are self-aware, it can help you grow in confidence, be a more effective leader, build strong relationships, perform well, and be your best self. It is important to acknowledge that every student's journey is different and every student has a different story. Self-awareness can help you to know what makes you unique, and to avoid peer pressure.

Try practicing self evaluation and reflection, perhaps through journaling or meditation, or by seeking constructive feedback from others. Try identifying your personal values and what is important to you, be honest with yourself. Acknowledge big emotions and smaller ones and things that trigger them. Notice how your emotions connect to a need or value being met or not. Notice how your behavior corresponds to your emotions, and listen to your body when it tells you it needs rest, food, (medical) care, empathy, connection, etc.

How would you rate your self-awareness on a scale of 0-10?

What one thing can you do to strengthen your self-awareness?



8. Find out what support and resources are available to you

Don't wait until you are struggling to find out what available resources and support there are for you or anyone you know. Be proactive and find out before you need them! Mapping out different people, university departments, and community organizations who are available to provide support is an important step. This means you will have the tools to navigate challenges as and when they arise.

Resources can fall across a wide range of domains: financial support, counseling, housing, health, family planning, or student study groups. They can work in different ways, from getting you over a crisis or support in strengthening your health, strength, balance and satisfaction in life. Check out your university orientation guidebook or website as a first step.

Asking for support can be hard to do - sometimes it can evoke feelings of failure, shame, or worrying about what others will think. There are many different types of 'help' and support, and different things can work for different people. Talk therapy or counseling is one strategy that can help. Support might also include physical activity, spirituality, music, the arts, community and cultural spaces.

The more we are comfortable in addressing our mental health and wellness, the more we break down the stigma and negative perceptions around it, and start to promote understanding and acceptance. It is much easier to solve a problem together, and early on than wait until other problems have piled up and there is a lot more to be sorted out.

What support networks are you already aware of? Are there times when you have reached out for support and it helped?



9. Check in with other scholars and students

Look out for other scholars and students who may be going through similar stressors while trying to settle into life at university. Most people are new and looking for acceptance and to make connections. You will probably find that others have similar fears and hesitations to you.

Be kind and supportive to others, and help build a community of compassion and care. Being sensitive, open minded, and respectful to different backgrounds, and cultural beliefs or practices can help you get along well with others. Check in with fellow students or housemates if you think they may be finding things hard, and let them know they are not alone.

If someone you know is struggling, be a listening ear. You don't have to fix the problem or take it on yourself. Providing a safe and non-judgmental space for someone to talk and feel heard can be a first step in helping them resolve their own problems. Be confident to suggest other resources on campus like peer counseling, the university wellness center, or checking in with the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program team.

How confident do you feel to support your friends and colleagues?

Has there ever been a time when your friends have helped you through a difficult time?



10. Stay connected

While it can sometimes feel easier to ignore a problem or hide away from it, it is important to communicate with those around you if you are struggling. Familiarize yourself with the different procedures at your university for example taking sick leave, asking for extensions or special considerations. Make connections with key people at your university such as tutors, academic advisors, staff members, class representatives, or student council members.

Feeling connected can also support your wellbeing. Although it can sometimes feel challenging or overwhelming when in a new environment, with a mix of different people from different backgrounds and cultures, some of the best friendships, partnerships, and even relationships start in university so try to get out there and be active outside of the classroom. Join a club or a sports team, choir or religious group, be part of a conference, volunteer to organize an event, or be part of the community.

Stay in touch with family and friends back home for additional support and to keep connected to other things outside university life.

How connected do you feel at your university at the moment?

What else might you be able to do to increase your social networks and feel more connected?





Solid Minds is a mental health clinic based in Kigali, Rwanda and works in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program to promote mental health and wellness for scholars, and their universities. Please reach out to us for more information:

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Stay connected with us:

