

Mental Wellbeing Essentials (Student course)

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*RMIT MENTAL WELLBEING
INITIATIVES*

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MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA



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Acknowledgement of Country

In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture it is respectful to formally womin djeka (welcome) people to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander country or land. At RMIT we do this with the following acknowledgement:



'Luwaytini' by Mark Cleaver, Palawa.

“We would like to acknowledge Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nations as the Traditional Owners of the land on which the University stands. We respectfully recognise Elders past, present and future.”

At RMIT we recognise and respect the unique culture and contribution that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people bring to our communities. We are also proud to provide study, cultural, & personal support to our Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students in their learning journey. We womin djeka you to further explore and experience more about Australian Indigenous culture by visiting our Indigenous education centre – Ngarara Willim Centre and interacting with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and students.

You may replace this page with an appropriate acknowledgement, or remove it depending on the cultural context of your learning institution

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Accessibility features of the web version of this resource

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- It has been optimised for people who use screen reading technology.
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In addition to the web version, this book is available in a number of file formats, including:

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About this book

Disclaimer

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Credits

This open textbook was adapted and created by the staff of RMIT University. The authors gratefully acknowledge the content contributions of past and present RMIT staff, including Vanna Garrick and Bronwyn Gresham. Mental wellbeing essentials was primarily adapted and customised from the following key resource, however other openly licenced content is also incorporated:

RMIT Mental Wellbeing Initiatives (2021). Mental wellbeing essentials. RMIT University

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By Dr. Lisa Cianci

RMIT Indigenous design: 'Luwaytini' by Mark Cleaver, Palawa.

Adapting this resource

Thanks for your interest in our Mental Wellbeing Essentials resource. We've made an effort to make this resource easily adaptable for use in other tertiary institutions, and hope it's of use to you. Throughout, we've added text boxes with instructions for adapting, or with generic text between pairs of asterisks to be filled in during adaptation. Below are examples of both kinds of instructional text.

On this page, add your Institution's contact details.

Learning Institution wants to create an environment that assists students to have healthy functioning. At times, we have included examples of audio, video or text quotes from members of our RMIT community. We'd encourage you to replace these with content from your own learning institution community, although you can leave ours in if preferred.

Welcome to *Enter your Learning Institution's name* Mental Wellbeing Essentials course!

This course is made up of three modules covering:

- Why looking after your mental wellbeing is important when studying
- Signs to look out for that might indicate you or others need extra support, and Practical tips for supporting others in distress
- How you can look after yourself when supporting others.

Remember these topics can be sensitive, so it's good to consider if this is the right time for you to do this course.

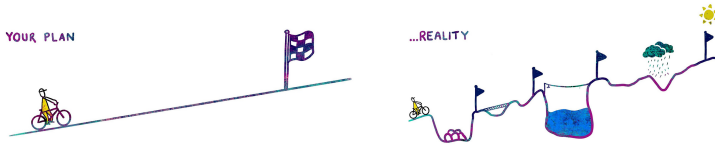
It's OK to exit the course at any time or to reach out to supports. *Enter your learning institution's Student Crisis Support Line details in here*.

If you are including a feedback survey, also include: **Your voice matters** to us! After completing these three modules, please share your experience in our survey. It takes less than 2 minutes, and your feedback will help shape this module for other students.

PART I

MENTAL WELLBEING

The path of study often takes twists and turns. Some of them you don't expect, others can range from being really great to incredibly challenging.



"Plan vs. reality" by David Heath is licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0

Learning about and investing in your mental wellbeing is like preparing for the path ahead. It can help you get through the tough times and give you energy in the tank for your studies and those around you.

Knowing where you are at along the path helps to determine what you might need. When things are more challenging, we need to take even more action to protect our health and wellbeing.

Research says that good mental health and wellbeing helps to:

- increase learning, creativity and productivity,
- improve social relationships and positive behaviour, and
- improve physical health and life expectancy.

Mental health and wellbeing

We all experience struggles from time to time. Just like in the wider community, tertiary students are not immune to experiencing distress or mental health conditions.**1 in 4** tertiary education students experience a mental health issue each year.

The *Learning Institution* community understands the importance of supporting each other. By completing this course you are contributing to *Learning Institute*'s positive action to reduce stigma around mental ill health and foster a community of care and support.

Here, insert a video or audio content of students discussing mental wellbeing – an example is provided below.

A discussion on mental health from Yamam & Mus (1:32 min)



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://rmit.pressbooks.pub/mentalwellbeingessentials/?p=34#video-34-1>

(A discussion on mental health from Yamam & Mus" by RMIT Wellbeing)



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<https://rmit.pressbooks.pub/mentalwellbeingessentials/?p=34#h5p-3>

A state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.

– World Health Organisation, Definition of Mental Health

Studying can be stressful

There is no shortage of extra pressure to juggle when you are studying. Balancing studies, work and other aspects of life can be a real challenge.

You are not alone.

Whilst everyone's experience is unique, there are some common stressors that students can experience. These include:

- study demands
- finding accommodation and adjusting to living away from home
- financial stress, debts or employment uncertainty
- isolation, loneliness or feeling like an outsider
- overt and subtle discrimination
- existential issues such as figuring out who you are and what you want to do with your life.

Here, insert audio or a video of students discussing stressors or struggles – an example is provided below.

Student experiences by RMIT Wellbeing Initiatives. (1:07).

Listen to this audio clip to hear students speaking about their experience.



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Managing stress

Some stress is beneficial – it can activate and motivate us. Without any stress we would be unlikely to get anything done at all. But too much stress over long periods isn't good for us.

Each individual has a different capacity for managing stress.

Your capacity to manage stress is influenced by your genetics, temperament, personality, upbringing, and previous significant life events. It is also influenced by the actions or strategies you use to cope.

Imagine a bucket as representing your ability to cope with stress.

- The size of your bucket will be bigger or smaller based on things like your genetics, temperament and life to date
- Your coping strategies release water from the tap on your bucket – preventing it from overflowing
- When you have more stress than you are able to manage or release, your bucket may overflow. This is distress.

Distress is the point at which demands have exceeded the capacity to cope.

When you or others aren't coping, reach out for help or use a healthy coping strategy that works for you. It's human to need another person's support. Call a friend, phone a helpline or talk with a counsellor or GP.

Here, insert links to in-institution and/or relevant outside-of-institution supports.

On this page, insert quote blocks from students at your institution talking about support-seeking – some examples are provided below.

Asking for help isn't a sign of weakness. It's a sign that **you're strong enough** to know that you could be better but need some help to get there. Even if someone else needs to give you the push, it is your strength that takes the first step.

– Lauren, Student

I know first hand what's it's like to have a mental illness, and how being at uni and studying can make it that much harder to deal with and can affect your work. There is **always someone to reach out to**, there is always someone feeling the same way. You're not alone.

– Brigitte, Student

The continuum

On a typical day, each of us is sitting somewhere along a continuum of wellbeing ranging from 'flourishing' right through to 'significant distress'. Being aware of how you or others are feeling is often the first step to moving in the right direction and helps with deciding the kind of action you might take.

We move along this continuum depending on the demands we're facing and the supports available to us.

If we spend too long in the *significant distress* zone, then we are at risk of experiencing a mental health condition.

It's good to take action to support your wellbeing wherever you are on the continuum.

Click on each of the plus signs along the continuum image below. Explore the kinds of experiences and actions you or others might experience.



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here:

<https://rmit.pressbooks.pub/mentalwellbeingessentials/?p=45#h5p-2>

Quiz



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<https://rmit.pressbooks.pub/mentalwellbeingessentials/?p=49#h5p-5>



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://rmit.pressbooks.pub/mentalwellbeingessentials/?p=49#h5p-6>

Let's review

Here are some key points to take away from this module.

1. Looking after your mental health and wellbeing contributes to work, study and life success.
2. Having a plan for how to manage your stress levels when they get too high is helpful.
3. Where a person is on the continuum can indicate the support they need and who's best to assist.

PART II

SUPPORTING OTHERS

Looking out for others

This module outlines practical ways you can support others. Don't worry – you are not expected to be a counsellor, have all the answers or go it alone. Taking notice, showing you care and seeking professional support when needed, are great ways that you can help.

Trust the signs

If you've noticed signs that someone might be struggling or you are feeling concerned about them, it can be difficult to know what to do next.

- Sometimes it might be obvious. Like when someone is in danger or you feel very concerned for their safety – you know to get immediate help.
- Other times it's more subtle. You might notice smaller signs, so you decide to keep an eye on things over time.



Photo by Alexis Brown on Unsplash

Below are a few ways you might become concerned about someone else:

They share that they are facing problems, and/or **disclose that they're not coping** at the moment.

You notice significant **change in their behaviour**. They are more emotional, withdrawn, or have started struggling with their studies.

You have a **gut feeling of concern** that grows over time as you get to know them better.

Identifying your level of concern

When you notice changes like the ones above, it may leave you wondering, *how concerned should I be?* The general rule is that there is a greater level of concern:

- the **longer** the distress signs have persisted,
- the more **risky** or **intense** the behaviour is,
- the more the distress **interferes** with their study and life.

Once you have identified your level of concern, you are better placed to decide on the action you might take and/or who you might reach out to for assistance.

When you are worried about someone showing many signs of 'common distress' or moving into the 'significant distress' end of the continuum it is good to get some professional support to help.

Knowing the available supports

There are a range of services that can give you guidance or provide professional support. These supports are helpful to keep as a reference so that you can access them when you need it.

Visit the *Learning Institute*'s website for a full list of *Learning Institute*'s and community-based supports *links to student supports site of your institution*.

Later in this module you will learn tips for how you can have conversations with someone you're concerned about and who can support you in an emergency.

Understanding your role

If you have an additional role such a mentor, club leader, volunteer or trip organiser it is important to know your responsibilities for assisting others in distress, raising concerns and the obligations for privacy, confidentiality and reporting.

You may also need to be aware of additional obligations for assisting students under the age of 18 years.

For more information contact your club program coordinator (or equivalent) or if the matter relates to concerning, threatening or inappropriate behaviour, contact *Learning Institute's safer community unit, or equivalent*.

Here, insert a link to the contact page/details for your Learning Institution's safer community unit.

Showing you care

If you're worried about someone, or your instincts and observations tell you they might not be okay, one way to give a person an opportunity to open up is to have a conversation with them and share your concerns.

- If they share that they're struggling, distressed, or suicidal, you can follow the R U OK?Day conversation steps. These are one way to show the person that they're supported, and might help them find strategies to better manage what they're dealing with.
- Even if they aren't having a difficult time right now, they'll know there are people in their life that care about them.

Remember checking in with others is not about being perfect or being heroic. It's about being human, being kind to yourself and getting support along the way.

Getting ready to have a conversation

Of course, part of being ready to ask if someone else needs support is making sure that, emotionally and psychologically, you're in a place where you're ready to hear their response – that means checking in on your own wellbeing. If you don't think now is a good time for you, consider whether there's someone else you could ask to have that kind of conversation with the person you're concerned about.

Helpful resources

- Beyond Blue's Check-in App is designed to help take the fear out of having a conversation with someone who is struggling.
- ReachOut.com offers great information on helping someone else.

Tips on how to have the conversation

If you're ready to have a conversation with someone you're concerned about, here are some tips to keep in mind.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://rmit.pressbooks.pub/mentalwellbeingessentials/?p=69#h5p-13>

Learning Institute wants to build our community's capability to assist others in distress and keep people safe. Just like this module, staff also receive training on assisting students in distress and have access to staff services which support them in their role.

Getting assistance

Some situations and concerns need to be handed over to trained professionals, such as Emergency Services or specialists.

Dangerous, risky or really concerning behaviour

If you or a fellow student is at immediate risk of harm it is essential to get assistance. An **emergency** situation might include someone:

- being violent or threatening towards others
- trying to hurt themselves or end their life (or intending to do so)
- appearing very confused, not making sense or having significantly impaired functioning

Disclosure of past harm

If a fellow student discloses an experience of unwanted or threatening behaviour including sexual harassment or assault, we encourage you to connect with the *Learning Institute Safer Community unit or equivalent* for support with guidance and advice.

In an emergency

Stay safe. Assess the safety of you and others in the situation.

Seek immediate support by contacting:

- Emergency services on **000 *or your country's equivalent***
- *Learning Institute* Urgent Security on ***phone number***
- *Learning Institute* Crisis Support Line on ***phone number***

Look after yourself and debrief with a counsellor, GP, mentor or teacher.

Debriefing and follow up

Debriefing and talking things through can help you let go of the stress and process the conversation. It means that you don't need to carry the burden alone. It's important to respect an individual's privacy as much as possible. So be conscious about who you speak with and what you share.

The *Learning Institute student counselling service – link* or the *Learning Institute crisis line – link* are good avenues for you to speak more freely about how you have experienced a situation, as they are trained professionals.

Quiz

Test your knowledge by placing the steps for having a conversation with someone you're concerned about in the correct order.



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<https://rmit.pressbooks.pub/mentalwellbeingessentials/?p=79#h5p-7>



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://rmit.pressbooks.pub/mentalwellbeingessentials/?p=79#h5p-8>

Let's review

Here are some key points to take away from this module.

1. Notice the signs and identify your level of concern
2. Ask 'are you OK?' or seek professional support
3. Know where to reach to out for support
4. Debrief and look after your own wellbeing

For more information on support available to students, visit
Learning Institute student support services.

PART III

LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

Quiz



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<https://rmit.pressbooks.pub/mentalwellbeingessentials/?p=84#h5p-9>

Self-care

Life is full of challenges, whether that's in the world around us and our environment, closer to home with our family and friends, or our mind and body health.

Learning, studying and being there for others is easier when you look after your own mind and body too. This module is about building self-care resources.

Self-care includes strengthening healthy habits for staying well, increasing skills to support the tough times, and finding ways of being that offer the potential to grow through experience.

What is self-care?

Self-care means taking a **genuine interest in yourself**, because you matter too.

At first, this can feel uncomfortable, selfish or in conflict with one's culture or heritage.

Yet, we know that people who take care of themselves are **more able to care for others** and **cope more effectively** when faced with stress and challenge.



"Self care: what works for you" by Darcy Keogh is licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0



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<https://rmit.pressbooks.pub/mentalwellbeingessentials/?p=88#h5p-12>

Self-care involves self-awareness. This involves taking regular moments to **notice what is impacting on your wellbeing.**

Self-care can entail **participating in one's community**, spending time with family, spiritual groups and nature.

Self-care can also involve **solo activities**, like going for a walk, healthy self-talk and mindfulness practice.

Your current approach

A discussion on approaches to self care with Yamam & Mus (0:42 min)



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://rmit.pressbooks.pub/mentalwellbeingessentials/?p=90#video-90-1>

(“A discussion on approaches to self care” by RMIT Wellbeing)



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://rmit.pressbooks.pub/mentalwellbeingessentials/?p=90#h5p-11>

Here, insert a quote from a student about why it's important to take care of themselves – ideally including some of healthy diet, lifestyle, time out, being active, music/media, socialising, or psychological strategies.

Taking extra time for self-care

Being there for someone in their time of distress can sometimes have an impact on you. In moments that you are feeling empathy or imagining yourself in the shoes of others, your own stress and emotions can sometimes be activated as well.

These are times that you need to take extra care to look after yourself and your needs.



Photo by Ilias Chebbi on Unsplash

If you have been supporting someone in distress you might notice feeling:

- **Frustrated** – being there for others when we are busy can take away precious time from other life matters.
- **Not good enough or helpless** – we can be critical of our own support, or not know what to do or say to make things better.

- **Worried** – about the person's wellbeing and safety.
- **Triggered** – that you are having the same difficulties.

These are all normal human responses. Notice when they show up for you and take time to understand what is occurring in your body and mind.

Being kind to yourself helps you make good decisions and is essential for self-care.

Set yourself reminders

Scheduling your self-care activities and setting reminders helps to keep on track.

Here, insert resources for students – e.g. wellbeing reminder wallpapers “one of these wallpapers to use on your device as a handy reminder to take time out for you”. Examples have been provided below.



“Self care wallpaper” by RMIT Studios is licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0



Self-care

means taking

a genuine interest

in yourself,

because

you matter too.

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Five ways to wellbeing

Research shows there are five simple things you can do as part of your daily life – for study, work and home life – to build resilience, boost your wellbeing and lower your risk of developing mental health problems.¹

These simple actions are known internationally as the Five Ways to Wellbeing: Connect, Be Active, Keep Learning, Give, and Take Notice.

Regularly practising the Five Ways is beneficial for everyone (and for anytime along the continuum) to enhance our wellbeing when life is going well and support us when faced with stress.

Connect: Talk and listen, be there, feel connected.

- Strengthen relationships by sharing stories and encouraging each other.
- Join a *Learning Institute* peer mentoring program – insert link here*
- Join a club, connect with *Learning Institute* student life or student clubs – *insert link here* or the student union *insert link here*
- Connect spiritually *add link to Learning Institute chaplaincy service* with others
- Reach out for extra support early. Call the *Learning Institute crisis line – insert link here* or our *medical clinical – insert link here* to speak with a GP about your

1. Aked, J., Marks, N., Cordon, C. & Thompson, S. (2011). *Five ways to wellbeing: New applications, new ways of thinking*. New Economics Foundation. https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/d80eba95560c09605d_uzm6b1n6a.pdf

mental health.

Give: Do something nice for someone, show your appreciation, do something nourishing for yourself.

- Become a mentor *insert link to student mentoring program*
- Volunteer through *Learning Institute* or in the community *insert link to volunteering resources on institution website*
- Create a small gift for a friend or neighbour.

Take Notice: Pay attention to the present moment and remember the simple things that give you joy.

- Notice when you have reached your limits and prioritise what you need.
- Pay attention to the small achievements, not just the big ones.
- Develop your skills being present via mindfulness *insert link to mindfulness resource*.

Keep Learning: Embrace new experiences, see opportunities, surprise yourself.

- Learn something new or rediscover an old interest.
- Be curious, understand different perspectives and grow through challenges.
- Learn study skills through *Learning Institute*'s free Study Support *insert link*
- Sign up for an *Learning Institute careers service offering – insert link*
- Learn how to support your wellbeing *insert link to mental wellbeing self-help resources*

Be Active: Moving our bodies supports our emotional and mental wellbeing.

- Step into nature and go for a walk.
- Play a game
- Join a fitness class or social sport *insert links* through *Learning Institute*
- Learn how to dance *insert link*.

If you'd like to learn more about the Five Ways to Wellbeing, check out more resources from the Mental Health Foundation (NZ) and Wellbeing SA.

Quiz



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://rmit.pressbooks.pub/mentalwellbeingessentials/?p=103#h5p-10>

Let's review

Here are the key points to take away from this module.

1. Self-care is about being proactive and taking care of your mind, body and world.
2. It is normal to experience some stress when helping others, so it's important to take extra care of yourself at these times.
3. Regular practise in self-care is the key to enhancing our wellbeing and supporting us through tough times.

Tell us what you think

We would love to hear what you think about this course!

Insert link to feedback survey

All responses are confidential and will only be used to help us improve this course for future students.

If appropriate, add here: "Once completed your certificate of completion will be emailed to your student email address."

If you have any questions about this course or would like to contact us directly, please email us at *Institute's email address for wellbeing feedback*.