Time Management

**Introduction**

Life always has many different aspects to it and there is a need for variety. Without a good balance of work and relaxation, your emotional resilience can be majorly impacted. However, it is not always easy to ‘strike that balance’.

**“You cannot add more minutes to the day, but you can utilise each one to the fullest… This is the key to time management, to see the value of every moment.” *Menachem Mendel Schneerson***

Managing time successfully can help you feel more in control of life and alleviate the guilt of what you ‘should’ be doing, by helping you to be more productive within the time that you have. This can help lead to a better balance, leaving more time in the day for activities that nourish you in other ways: whether that be hobbies, socialising, sleep, or anything that recharges your batteries.

**Developing Good Time Management**

***Self-Awareness/ Self-Care*.** In order to get started on developing time management techniques, it is important to be aware of your own body and self. Often, struggles with effective use of time can begin because your body is not in a place where it is able to give its full concentration and resources to the task at hand. By understanding signs your body needs a break, you won’t be as at risk of exhaustion, by continuing to try to push on with an empty battery. Productivity can be a vicious cycle, where you feel you ‘should’ be doing something and chain yourself to your work, not being able to concentrate and then becoming more frustrated and adding to your stress levels. It is ok to recognise that you are not able to give 100 percent right now, and to work on resting and restoring, to come back stronger so you can tackle those tasks.

***Define your priorities.*Each one of us is different, so it is useful to sit down and work out what is important to you within life. That may be seeing friends; spending time with family; keeping up your physical health; walking the dog daily; getting a good degree; or keeping up a favourite hobby. Think about what you value in life and where your ultimate aims lie. It may be useful to physically list these items and rank them from 1 to 5 in terms of how much importance they have. This will give you an idea of where bigger chunks of your time may need to be allocated in order to get the results you want and to lead a lifestyle which feels fulfilling.**

***Write that ‘to do’ list.*It doesn’t work for everyone, but having a written ‘to do’ list gets those jobs down on paper and away from the realms of being forgotten (which we often fear will happen). It can be useful to make several lists, one for the longer term goals, and then a day to day one. For example, ‘write essay’ or ‘mark exams’ may not be an accomplishment you can make in one evening. Instead break it down and make it realistic. Day 1: gather information/ the mark scheme together; Day 2: write essay introduction/ mark 10 exam papers etc.  
Find your ‘limit’ and plan accordingly, with a set time to switch off for the day. In many sectors a working day would be around 8 hours, so be realistic and don’t try to spend every waking hour on tasks. Set your ‘to do’ list targets accordingly, so 2 paragraphs done, or your proof of concept, rather than 5,000 words. If you get on a roll then fantastic, if not, you are a step closer to the ultimate goal than you were yesterday.  
It is hard to achieve the task of ‘work harder’ or ‘spend more time with my daughter’, but easier to break down goals such as getting a 2:1 or above in a piece of coursework or making the time to attend your child’s football games.**

***Prioritising.*Prioritising tasks can be difficult, but can make life feel easier as less time is ‘wasted’. It is important to remember that priority shouldn’t just be given to academic work/ your working life. Whilst this is important, a lack of significant down time will make it harder to sustain productivity. Some people find that prioritising within their daily diary is a useful strategy. This can apply not only to prioritising the things that need to be done, but also what you feel is essential for a healthy, happy life. Add those things on to your ‘to do’ list too- such as preparing lunch ready for the next day; 20 minutes yoga practice or (non- compulsory!) reading time; a daily walk or checking in with your best friend or partner. By seeing these written in every day, you won’t forget to prioritise the most important thing: your wellbeing. They say it takes between 21 and 66 days to form a habit, and some things are important to keep doing.  
The next step is to then go through and organise your ‘to do’ list. You may find highlighting in different colours or using a key works for you. Create categories for what is urgent (due in that or the next day), things that should get done (important, but not vital. Ringing up to correct a bill, for example) and things you would like to get done, but that can wait until another day. Then work through each of these categories in turn.**

***Tackle those tasks- be dynamic.* Break tasks down dynamically, especially if they feel difficult to do. For example, commit to 45 minutes of working solidly on that task and then schedule a break. By having a clear end point in sight, and one not too far away, you are more likely to commit to working harder for the short time you have. Be sure to have a 20 to 30 minute break at least every 2 hours of work, to maintain optimum concentration. If you really struggle to get motivated still, then step away and think about why and try to work through the root of the issue. Visualise what effect putting the task off may have versus how you will feel once it is over.**

***Keep on going*. Ensure you always set an end time for yourself every day and stick to it; then you can have some rest time and can come back the next day ready to keep on at the task. Try not to panic if your timetabling isn’t working, as routines take a while to build. Consider alternative ways to plan which may work better if it still feels like it isn’t the right fit for you- for example, wall planners, a whiteboard or moveable post it notes.**

**Tips:**

* **Try the ‘2 minute rule’. If it can be done in 2 minutes then do it now. If not add it to your to-do list. Use the time the kettle is boiling to wash up your breakfast plate or wipe the counter tops, or the time your work is taking to print to quickly gather up any rubbish and bin it or pop clean washing on hangers. This helps keep on top of the daily tasks, which can feel a time drain.**
* **It is often advisable to start with the tasks you feel you most want to avoid, as these will be the ones which spark more anxiety when they are not completed.**
* **If maintaining concentration can be an issue then try to ‘give it 5’. When you hit the point where you feel frustrated or your mind starts to wander then ask yourself to do just 5 more minutes. This will re-focus you to your task and push your boundaries, helping you to develop your concentration.**
* **Work on one task at a time and finish it. This can be a particular issue for people who have perfectionism traits, as there can be the temptation to keep on honing and thus ending up putting off other tasks. By working to completion, or to a time limit, on which you will move on to another area, you will ensure one task doesn’t take up the whole day and night.**
* **Reflect once a week on what was and was not effective in helping you to manage your time, so you can adjust if necessary.**
* **A 2012 study by Gloria Mark suggests that, on average, a distraction arises every 3 minutes in the modern age of technology. Think about ways to avoid the main distractions that arise for you, whether that is a ‘do not disturb’ sign on your door, or switching your phone onto flight mode.**
* **Identify your attention traps. Make note of the little things that take your attention from studying, such as regularly checking your emails or wanting to turn on/ off the radio. Dedicate a set time to these tasks, such as 5 minutes each time you sit back down to work and then close this down and prep your environment ahead of proceeding, such as putting on music or clearing the clutter from your desk. Research suggests that once distracted it takes 15 minutes to regain focus, so get all these tasks out of the way before you begin. This will help you get, and stay in, a productive zone, as those distracting thoughts will be less powerful.**