Juggling Post-Secondary and Depression

by NIKKI THOMPSON

Coping With University Depression

University is said to be ‘the best times of your life’. This is the time where you may begin your adult life, move away from home and make a new start as an independent individual. Or even expand your knowledge as a mature student returning to study. However the stress of university life and coping with depression may make it harder for some people and they may struggle with their studies during this time.

If you’re currently at university or you’re thinking of attending university, there are a lot of factors you should take into account when deciding on a university, or wanting to find ways to manage with depression whilst you’re at university. Here are some basic ways for you to maintain a healthy and happier time whilst at university and cope with depression.

Location

When I came to choosing my university, I struggled to decide whether I should stay close to home, or leave the nest and become more independent. Some people like to leave their past behind, or have thoughts about their home town that can trigger their depression and move far away. Others find comfort in the current support they have around them with friends and family and choose to study closer to home, or commute to a local school. It is important to consider the possibility of depression after moving. If you are worried that living with new people or moving to a new place will cause more stress or increase your levels of depression, there is nothing wrong with staying local or commuting to your nearest university. However, if you want to live independently, you should not let your depression hold you back from your potential either. Aim for a decision based on your mental health and your own wants and needs.

Support

Regardless of whether you are currently studying or you’re considering furthering your education, you should be made aware of the support that is made available to you. If you are struggling to cope with assignments, exams, socialising and depression, universities usually have a student support in place to help you. Do not be afraid to talk to your lecturers or someone you feel comfortable talking to about seeking help through the university.

Extensions can be granted if you need them for essays. Counselling/therapy services may also be available. It is important to know what your options are in case you feel like you find it too much to struggle with university and depression. There are people there who want to help you succeed with the least amount of stress possible whilst attending college and you should not hesitate to find the right support you see fit. People with depression may lack concentration or motivation to do tasks such as writing, attending classes and revising for exams. The more aware you make the university’s support system aware of what daily life is like for someone with depression, the more they can help you.

Finance

One of the most difficult problems with being independent is being able to financially support yourself. The stress and worrying around money can make your depression feel worse and may lead to hopelessness that you will never find a way out from your money problems. To try and help your mental health in regards to this is to learn to budget your money and make it as stress free as possible. It's important to maintain a healthy lifestyle to help improve your depression by eating well and buying good foods, but also to try and not over-indulge on things you don't need even though you believe they may improve your mood in the short-term.

Getting a part time job alongside your studies may help with financial aid; however it is important to not push yourself too hard. If you feel like you cannot juggle education and work then focus more on your education and budgeting your money well. Your health should be your main priority and you should take all the appropriate steps to a healthier and happier recovery.

Socializing

Suffering with depression may make it hard for you to socialize with new people or make it uncomfortable for you to attend classes where you know no familiar faces. Living with people you've never met may seem the most terrifying concept. Yet it is important that you do not isolate yourself in these situations. Depression can become worse when the person is isolated as they feel they have no escape and no one to confide in. Taking small steps to meet new people can help you, even if it is just attending all your classes and meeting your classmates, or making small talk with your roommates if you live away from home. Joining a society or social event in something that really interests you or you are passionate about are also great ways to maintain a stable social life. You do not have to be social all the time or push yourself to be social, especially if you prefer being alone some days. Find a happy balance in your own time to meet new people.

Also if you have good friends around you from your hometown, stay in touch with them. Whether they are near you or far away, social media is a great way to stay in contact and communicate with your close friends. If you're not ready to meet new people straight away, confide in your current friends and they may give you advice or support you through this.

Conclusion

University is one of the biggest milestones in a person's life. It is a big decision to make and should not be chosen lightly. Even though I have had hardships whilst studying with depression, finding the appropriate support from the university and my peers has helped me progress through my degree. It is also important to know that you are not alone throughout this part of your life. Millions of people suffer from depression worldwide and some of them are also attending university and trying to do the best they can. Finding ways to cope with depression and studying will help improve you daily routine and mental well-being.