



THE STUDENT WELLBEING HANDBOOK

To inspire, support, and encourage self-care in becoming a flourishing student

A collaboration by students and staff within the School of Education, Childhood, Youth and Sport



The Open
University



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Foreword from Sarah Jones OU Students Association President 2020-2022



If you are a typical student, like I am, you will know the difference that studying can have on your wellbeing. When you are struggling everything feels like a huge mountain to climb but when you are doing well you are able to pace yourself and study effectively.

This book has been developed by students and staff from the Student Voice and Wellbeing group within the School of Education, Childhood, Youth and Sport (ECYS). It will help you focus on the five ways of wellbeing: connect, give, take notice, keep learning and be active.

It goes into depth about how these five ways can make a difference to your mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing. I encourage you to explore what the five ways mean and how you could apply some of the ideas to your wellbeing own plans.

As I have gone through my own student journey, I have personally explored the difference it has made to give back of my time by volunteering. It has helped me to connect to others studying and make new friends. Through studying I have continued to learn and try new things, such as being part of the ECYS Student Voice and Wellbeing group.

As a student, setting aside the time to look after your wellbeing is just as important as setting aside time to study. We hope that as you explore what is inside this handbook you will find some of the important tools to help you along that journey.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Sarah Jones'.

Sarah Jones

OU Students Association President

Introduction

We invite you to dive into these pages with curiosity and a genuine desire to support your wellbeing while you begin, or continue, your life-long learning with The Open University. This resource has been created by both student and staff from the School of Education, Childhood, Youth and Sport. You will find fantastic contributions from a wide range of students, as well as activities which can be completed offline to enhance your mental health and wellbeing.

This resource does not have to be explored in a linear fashion. You can dip in and out of it throughout the year, look at different sections, and try out some of the activities whenever you wish. To support The Open University's environmental sustainability mission, we recommend that you download the handbook and save onto your device to access as and when you want. Should you wish, it can also be printed off (though if you do this, bear in mind that there are hyperlinks embedded within).

A brief background to this handbook

The seeds of this resource arose from concerns identified by the ECYS Student Voice and Wellbeing Ambassadors. These same energetic students, with busy lives and study commitments themselves, became the main co-creators of this engaging and interactive support pack aimed at encouraging proactive support for student mental health and wellbeing from the moment students embark on their Open University studies within the school.

Along the way, those of us who have contributed to the project have been overwhelmed by the wonderful and thought-provoking contributions that have been made in terms of artwork, poetry, stories and activities from across our wider community.

Above all, we are keen to have a variety of resources and for a range of student voices in particular to be heard. The main strength of this resource is that it draws directly on student experience and what students feel best supports their wellbeing while studying at The Open University.



Why focus on mental health and wellbeing at University?

Studying at university and having a future goal in mind such as enhancing career prospects, and learning new academic and professional skills can certainly be rewarding, enriching and boost mental wellbeing. At the same time there can be many aspects of university life, especially when studying at a distance, that can adversely impact on your wellbeing. For instance, juggling work, parenting/caring responsibilities with study can be extremely demanding and even more so when dealing with financial constraints, conflicts in relationships, personal physical and mental health conditions as well as other unforeseen stressful life events.

Research¹ conducted by Student Minds (The UK's student mental health charity) in 2022 found that 43% of student said they need support to manage their wellbeing, and fewer than 50% felt equipped to manage the pressures of university life.

Therefore with these issues around mental health and wellbeing at the forefront of our thinking, and in order to look at positive and proactive ways that all of us can promote healthy wellbeing, students and staff at The Open University decided to produce this handbook together. We believe we are all responsible in helping to support good mental health and wellbeing across the whole of university and in our wider lives.

The Open University's Student and Staff Wellbeing Strategy (2020-2023)² identifies the institution's responsibility to support the growth of good mental health and wellbeing by promoting: terms of artwork, poetry, stories and activities from across our wider community.

The Open University's Student and Staff Wellbeing Strategy (2020-2023)² identifies the institution's responsibility to support the growth of good mental health and wellbeing by promoting:

An inclusive and supportive culture, underpinned by effective and timely support systems and training about mental health and wellbeing that allows our students and staff to maximise their potential and achieve success.

What underpins our ideas?

Mental health and wellbeing encompasses a range of factors. Within this handbook we have considered the bio-psycho-social model (Engel, 1977)³, acknowledging that biological, social and environmental, and psychological factors all contribute to an individual's wellbeing.

Additionally, we chose to focus the handbook on five ways of wellbeing promoted by Mind, a UK based mental health charity. These five ways are: **connect, be active, take notice, learn, and give.**

Our aim

We envisage that this handbook goes some way to considering our mental health and wellbeing more holistically, i.e. from an overarching perspective rather than from any single standpoint. We also hope that some of the strategies and suggestions may help us become more aware of what we can do using a more positive approach to support ourselves, as well as others.

As Natalie Nussey (a student ambassador and contributor to this handbook) sums up:



“

I think this handbook would be useful to OU students because it offers a 'go to' space to access, when life seems to be pulling you in every direction and you just need a few moments to pause, reflect and re-focus.

Natalie Nussey
student Ambassador

”

Short of time?

Studying at university can be very demanding and, at times, quite stressful. You might think you don't have enough time to really take care of your mental health and wellbeing. However, when we are busy, stress and worries can often build up – so it's important to take the time to prioritise your wellbeing. Don't be hard on yourself, there is always time to do something to improve our wellbeing:



5 minutes

- Make a hot drink and enjoy it with no distractions
- Text a friend to see how they are
- Write a to-do list for the week



10 minutes

- Do some stretching to loosen your body up
- Listen to a couple of your favourite songs
- Use a meditation app



30 minutes

- Take a walk
- Call a someone close to you for a catch up
- Do some exercise



1 hour

- Go for a coffee with a friend
- Bake something delicious
- Watch an episode of your favourite TV show or current boxset

**TAKE YOUR TIME TO ENJOY,
REFLECT AND EXPLORE**

**THIS HANDBOOK FURTHER.
ON BEHALF OF ALL THE
AUTHORS, WE WISH YOU
WELL IN YOUR STUDENT
JOURNEY AT THE
OPEN UNIVERSITY.**

Further support

We can all experience varying levels of wellbeing and at times our mental health might be compromised. We hope this guide provides you with inspiration and practical advice to help you to support your own wellbeing. However if you are experiencing mental health difficulties, whether it be a diagnosed condition or unhelpful and distressing feelings, then there is support for you.

The student Help Centre provides further information on [wellbeing](#), including the text based support provided by [Shout](#). Students have greatly benefited from both of these. There is also the OU booklet '[studying and staying mentally healthy](#)' which you may find useful, and the [OpenLearn](#) platform has a variety of information on wellbeing and mental health. If your wellbeing is impacting your ability to study then we have a range of support for you. Please visit the [Help Centre](#), which includes guidance on a range of topics included who and when to speak to your Student Support Team. If you are studying whilst experiencing a mental health difficulty the university's [Disability Support Team](#) can put into place appropriate support.

There are also external sources which you may be beneficial, including this [NHS help page](#), or you can search local support through the [Hub of Hope](#). Finally, if you are experiencing any severe emotional distress then please contact your GP or call the Samaritans on 116 123.

Authors

This resource has been created by the following students from the School of Education, Childhood, Youth and Sport: Nichola Connolly, Kitty French, Natalie Nussey, and Yasmin Reeve, with support from staff members: Liz Middleton, Steph Doehler and Amber Fensham-Smith.



Acknowledgements

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B81 Designs for bringing our vision to life by designing an engaging and vibrant handbook.

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2. The Open University (2020) Student and staff mental health and wellbeing strategy 2020-2023. Available at: <https://www.open.ac.uk/about/main/sites/www.open.ac.uk.about.main/files/files/Mental-health-and-wellbeing-strategy.pdf>
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CONNECT

According to Mind (2020)¹, there is strong research which suggests that feeling close to, and valued by, others is a fundamental human need and one that contributes to functioning well in the world. We know that social relationships are vital in the promotion of wellbeing for people of all ages.

This first wellbeing theme has been developed with student ambassador, Nichola Connolly.

Human connections we make need to enrich our lives and help us flourish as emphasised in the following poem by Georgia Appleyard-Harris.

CONNECTION IS A HUMAN NEED

by Georgia Appleyard-Harris, Student in Education Studies (Primary)

Connecting means spending time to develop relationships in which you feel valued in.

Opening a window or a door is a simple way to let nature in, if you do not have access to the outdoors.

Never feel ashamed for sharing your thoughts or feelings. Doing this can help you make your next choices.

No – connecting does not always have to be with others. Connecting with yourself is important too.

Everyday take a little time to connect. Sometimes scheduling this in might help it become a habit.

Community – it is important to build upon people and resources which can help you.

Technology can be a great way to connect for some, but taking time away is also important.

How loneliness or lack of social connections can be an issue

When we begin our studies, especially through distance learning, it's entirely understandable to feel isolated, or even lonely sometimes.

Emphasising this, loneliness was the Mental Health Foundation's theme during Mental Health Awareness Week in 2022. In 2021, they stated that:

88% of Britons aged from 18 to 24 said they experience loneliness to some degree, with 24% often experiencing loneliness and 7% saying they are lonely all of the time (Mental Health Foundation, 2021)².

Other risk factors which might increase chances of loneliness, and therefore detrimentally impact mental health and wellbeing, irrespective of

age. This may include being single, widowed, unemployed, living alone, having a long-term health condition/disability, living in rented accommodation, being a carer, or feelings of being excluded due to race, gender identity or sexual orientation.

What this means in practical terms is that we all need to be mindful of ourselves as well as our fellow students to find ways that we can help each other to connect, either as part of tutor group activities, within tutorials or even as developing positive study-buddy relationships that allow us all to grow and develop our learning together.



Student story by Nichola Connolly - Student in Education Studies (Primary)

Volunteering with the OU Student's Association and joining their events and sessions has helped me connect with other students.

I've have also used Mindapples, a charity that helps people take care of their minds, and this has been a form of support for my own mental wellbeing as it helped connect with other likeminded people. I am now a Mindapples Champion! There is an app on both Android and Apple with various resources, such as different sessions for student to connect with others, and they can also be followed through social media. You can follow them through their [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) pages. Being a Mindapples Champion has involved facilitating interactive sessions for other students around wellbeing. For example, in one session we came up with our own five

'mindapples' about what we could instigate in our lives to cope with the struggles of life. It was really well received and helped me with my own wellbeing by being able to share my lived experience and hear other people's inspirational stories of how they manage their own mental health and wellbeing.

Connecting with other students has been huge for my mental health and a big part of my student journey. It has helped by being able to discuss my struggles with others and showed me that it's not only me that has challenges and worries about studying. Connecting with others has definitely helped with the isolation and loneliness, by knowing that there is a huge community of OU students out there.



Be connected by Charlotte Minton – Student in Education Studies (Primary)

Activity - Creating healthy network of social networks

Before you start you might find it useful to reflect on what makes a supportive, healthy connection for you. Sometimes we need to step back and have a good look at what we are gaining from the different relationships and connections we have. We need to select who we choose to confide in and who will genuinely support us when we are struggling or need that extra motivation to continue our study. We also should identify which of our relationships are causing us distress and, where necessary, seek further help to enable us to deal with these effectively.

Create a colourful mind-map or poster with the names of people who make up your healthy network of social connections. These are people who support, energise, encourage, enrich and enable you in positive ways (perhaps friends and family, other students, neighbours, colleagues, social activity groups, and so on).

Keep your poster/mind-map on the wall or somewhere where you can remind yourself of who they are, especially when you are feeling less confident about yourself or upset. [Visit mind-map techniques in The Open University Help Centre if you would like more on this.](#)

Make a point to keep in contact with these healthy relationships and identify how you intend to achieve this (for example: in person, online, text, phone).

Also think about which people might be best to contact for different purposes and any advice you may need at times. Put their contact details in a notebook or on the same poster.

Finally... consider ways in which to stop or reduce contact with those who criticise you or are unsupportive.

Activity - Mindapples

Inspired by Nichola's engagement with Mindapples here is an example of an activity which addresses connection from a slightly different angle – how you can connect with yourself. Just in case you were wondering, a mindapple is a day to day activity that is good for your mind.

Draw your own large apple on a piece of paper and within the apple write five things you can do every day to look after your mind to help you connect to yourself. This might include paying attention to your feelings (especially if you have any triggers) or reflecting on what you have achieved each day.

This activity aims to reinforce good habits which encourage you to be more mentally healthy.

Visit the [Mindapples](#) website if you would like to learn more about the charity.

Top tips to connect – by Nichola

These are what I would suggest for any student feeling isolated or uncertain how to connect, especially distance learning students:

1. Check out your module welcome forums and introduce yourself. Don't forget to join your own tutor group forums too to connect with others who you are likely to communicate with throughout the academic year.
2. To support the above suggestion, you could complete the [OpenLearn course 'Building confidence in using online forums'](#). This an extremely helpful and insightful free short course to alleviate concerns of feelings of anxiety about engaging in online learning forums.
3. To help with meaningful connections you could join clubs or societies within the Students Association - this is a great first step to connecting with other students that have similar interests. [Visit the OU Students Association website here.](#)
4. Attend regular events hosted by the [Students Association](#) or [Student Hub Live](#). They aren't as scary as you might think!

Take a moment to reflect on 'connect'

- What does connect mean to you? Why do you feel positive connection with others is so important for you as a student? How do you connect with other students within/outside of the OU?
- Thinking of Georgia's words in her poem 'Connection is a human need', how do you allow time to connect to yourself? How do you strike the balance between engaging in social media and taking quality time for yourself and to be with yourself?
- What might be your next steps be to develop more positive and good quality connections with others and yourself?
- Identify one thing you are proud of and one thing you would like to change in relation to your connection with either others or yourself.

“Connecting with other students has been huge for my mental health and a big part of my student journey”

Nichola Connolly (Student)

Below is a poignant poem by Mrs Sunshine – Student in ECYS. As you read it, pick out one or two key words/phrases that catch your attention in some way. Write these down if you feel that would be helpful to you. Also, who might you consider to be your own 'angel face', i.e., someone you feel is ready to help you? How might you be an 'angel face' for others?

ANGEL FACE

by Mrs Sunshine - Student in ECYS

When we love people... the world is beautiful

When we accept that the world is beautiful... we love the people around us.

When we shine and help others to shine the sun is smiling at us in return.

When we catch fire, we seek for the bucket to cool us down...

When we struggle, we would like to hide deep down...?

All this is to cry for help when nobody else can hear us...

The angel face is there to make sure we are OK and with the warmth of Spring sunshine will help you to start the day again.

As asking for help is such a human thing - let's not be afraid

To use it and when you struggle

There is always an angel ready to help

Open your hurt and shout as you deserve to be listened to; it will lighten up your heart!



Useful links

[Loneliness and Mental Health Report UK 2022](#)

[Mental Health Foundation resources](#)

Visit the [Mindapples](#) website

[OU Students Association page on wellbeing](#)

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1. Mind (2020) Five ways to wellbeing. Available at: <https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-yourself/five-ways-to-wellbeing/>

2. Mental Health Foundation (2021) Loneliness in young people: research briefing. Available at: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/campaigns/unlock-loneliness/research-briefing#:~:text=A%20survey%20conducted%20in%202019,lonly%20all%20of%20the%20time.>

GIVE

Action for Happiness, a global movement and charity, highlight how scientific studies show that helping others can support our own happiness. Benefits of giving can include: increasing our sense of satisfaction with life, providing us with a purpose as well as increasing self-confidence and reducing personal stress. In fact, people who help others are found to live longer! (Action for Happiness, 2022)¹.

This section has been led by student ambassador, Natalie Nussey and covers the actions of giving to others and also to oneself. On this topic, Natalie says: 'Personally, as a student, 'giving' means volunteering as a Student Voice Ambassador, and this gives me such peace of mind and joy to know that I make a difference to others.'

Giving does not have to mean using up a great deal of time and energy which you may well not have in abundance when dealing with all the issues of family, work and study. We need to be aware that small 'acts of kindness' are equally valuable. You may not feel like engaging too much with others but might just be able to acknowledge them briefly with a

smile. You might simply give your seat to someone else on a crowded bus, or help someone with a pushchair manage some steps, or even slow down so that someone can merge in front of you when driving in traffic.

However, giving shouldn't always be associated with others. Giving to ourselves, known as self-compassion, is also important for our wellbeing. Self-care is about engaging in activities that replenish us, nourish us to stay balanced in body mind and spirit, keeping us fit and resilient in times of physical or emotional stress. Therefore we need to make sure that we give ourselves sufficient sleep, healthy food, and take time to do things that relax and refuel our energy.

GIVING

by Natalie Nussey - Student in Education Studies (Primary)

You may have heard it said, 'It's a dog-eat-dog world,'
And 'The world is yours, just take a bite.'

But I am here to say today that giving brings light to the darkest night.

Well, I hear you say, 'I have been there, done that,
Had the T-shirt, bought the merch, got the hat.'

But as our dear friend Charles Dickens once said,
'No-one is useless in this world who lightens
The burdens of another.'

Could it be time you give spent with your brother?
Or love shed abroad, with a coffee for a stressed young mother?

How do you know dear friend, if that one act of kindness
Was the first time in a month that the recipient had felt
The warmth of charity, compassion, and loveliness.

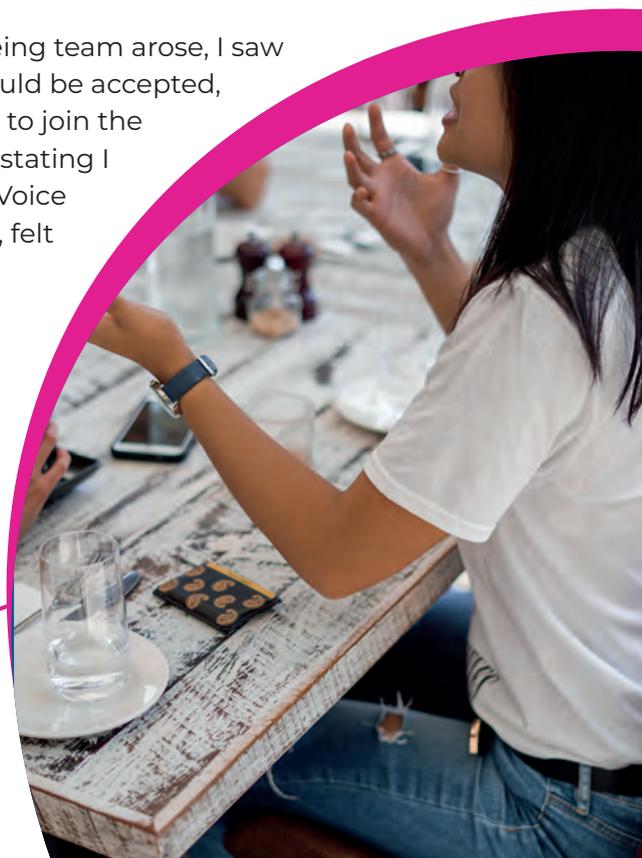
Yes, dear one, cast off the restraints of this old world and its ways,
And give of your time, your love and your days.

As you give to others, it shall be given to you,

Student story by Natalie Nussey - Student in Education Studies (Primary)

Finding myself as an Open University student in a pandemic was a very testing time. However, I received such excellent support from Student Support Services, my tutors, and peers that I wanted to give something back to the university.

When an opportunity to join the ECYS Student Voice and Wellbeing team arose, I saw this as a way to achieve giving. I was unsure if my application would be accepted, nevertheless, within a few weeks, I received an email inviting me to join the group. I was completely blown away and immediately replied to stating I would be only too happy to accept the offer to join as a Student Voice and Wellbeing Ambassador. I was offered an excellent induction, felt total inclusion, and received 100% support. Never did I feel that I was getting in the way and always felt like a valued member of the team.



Top tips to connect – by Natalie

To my fellow students I would say if you were able, and an opportunity arises with the Open University to volunteer, go for it, you will not be disappointed. You will find that in giving your time, you will gain so much more in experience, friendships, support, and skills.

However, we appreciate volunteering may not be for everyone and some of you may already have intensive responsibilities on top of your study. You may want to consider some of the ideas mentioned in earlier activities which suggested carrying out simple 'acts of kindness' maybe once or twice a week.

Activities

1. Sign up for the [Action for Happiness 10-day challenge](#), a free online programme to boost your wellbeing through daily actions for happier living. Each morning you will receive a message with a new activity, highlighting how you can support your own and other people's happiness. It only takes a few minutes each day.
2. Be kind to yourself - take a walk, go for a coffee, take a bubble bath, what else?
3. Perform a random act of kindness - send an encouraging message, tell someone you are thankful for something they did recently, hold the door for someone, next time you go shopping buy an extra item, however small, and leave it in the foodbank basket at the supermarket if you can. What else might you do?
4. Give yourself permission to indulge in an activity you really enjoy at least once a week - a yoga class, cooking, making something using your hands, go swimming, whatever you feel like doing. Remember, looking after yourself is not being selfish but can, in fact, enable you to have more energy and focus to 'give' to others. None of us can keep on caring for others effectively if our own cup is empty!

Did you know?
Research into actions for promoting happiness has shown that committing an act of kindness once a week over a six-week period is associated with an increase in wellbeing²

Take a moment to reflect on 'giving'

- What does 'give' mean to you? Why do you feel giving to others is so important for you in your study and as a student? How might you give to others within/outside The Open University?
- Thinking of the poem 'Giving', earlier in this section - how might you show more compassion to others in small ways?
- As part of self-compassion how might you give to yourself, allow yourself some 'me-time' without feeling guilty?
- Identify one thing you can do today to show how you can give to others.
- Identify one thing you can do today to show you can give to yourself
- What might your next steps be to develop a little more compassion and self-compassion in your life?



Useful links

Visit the [Action for Happiness 10-day challenge](#)

See the full list of [OU Students Association Societies](#)

Get involved in [volunteering with OU Students Association](#)

Learn more about [peer support with OU Students Association](#)

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1. Action for Happiness (2022) 10 keys to happier living. Available at: <https://actionforhappiness.org/10-keys/giving>

2. Mind (2020) Five ways to wellbeing. Available at: <https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-yourself/five-ways-to-wellbeing/>

TAKE NOTICE

It can be easy to rush through life without pausing for a moment. We become focused on the next milestone (the next TMA submission, a holiday, an event we've been looking forward to, the end of the academic year!). Yet, according to Mind (2020)¹ reminding ourselves to stop and take notice can strengthen and broaden our awareness. We're sure you have heard the term 'mindfulness' – the NHS (2018)² suggest that paying more attention to the present, to our own thoughts and feelings, and the world around us, can improve our mental wellbeing.

As Kitty's poem below suggests we could all do with slowing down, just for a while at least, to take in the present. Where might you go just for a few minutes each day in order to use all of your senses to take notice of what surrounds you?

TAKE NOTICE

by Kitty French - Student in Early Childhood

Life is such a fast paced thing;
Move,
Or get left behind
-but-
How do we notice true beauty
If we always step aside?
A pause here is what's needed
To turn the hands of time,
To stop the present bombard
Commonly known as everyday strife
Look up for once and notice
The colour of the leaves
Hear the children's laughter
As it filters through the breeze
Slow down and take this moment
Breathe, and smile inside
Take notice of the here and now

How can you be better at taking notice?

Being aware of the present moment and stepping back from the adrenaline rush of everyday 'busyness' can help us feel more grounded and can help us focus more and achieve a greater sense of 'calm'.

Vseteckova et al. (2021)³ highlight how research found that through mindfulness intervention, individuals reported a reduction in stress levels and experienced an increase in brain volume in parts of the brain responsible for learning and regulating emotion. In practical terms this means mindfulness can assist us to focus more and manage our emotions which is key to sound mental health.

As we become more aware of our own physical sensations, our breathing and what we can see, hear, touch, taste and smell in our environment, we can focus on who we are and how we can interact with the world around us more attentively. Combining such mindfulness practice for just a few minutes each day with a walk outside and you are covering at least two ways of improving your mental health and wellbeing on a regular basis.



Activities

Many students have remarked how helpful they have found these activities. Maybe you could give these a go to settle yourself before studying.

Grounding and focus

Calm your breathing, taking deep breaths in and out. As you do this, identify: five objects around you that you can see, four sounds you can hear, three textures you can feel, two smells you can sense or imagine and one taste you can sense or imagine.

Breathing focus

Imagine a box drawn in front of you (you could draw your own box on paper). Use the sides of the box to guide your breathing, breathe in for a count of four as you trace along one side, breathe out for four along the second side, breathe in for four along the third side and then out for four before you reach where you started.

Tapping Emotional Freedom Technique

People who use this technique believe tapping the body can create a balance in your energy system and treat pain. The idea is linked to acupuncture and focuses on the ways that negative energy can be released from the body. Research continues to be undertaken but there appears to be positive outcomes reported for people who have high levels of anxiety. Visit this page on YouTube to find out more.

Zentangles and mindful doodles

These can be a very relaxing way to calm the mind and also to slow down in order to increase focus and attention. Regularly creating art in this way can relieve stress and anxiety and increase confidence. There are some great videos on YouTube which introduce Zentangle and offer beginners guides.

Mindful doodles offer similar benefits by focusing on creating pattern designs whilst not thinking too much about what is actually being drawn.

Here are two examples from ECYS Associate Lecturer, Liz Middleton.



Engaging with music

Do you like to study or work with music on in the background? Lots of people do, yet, we don't really take much notice of what is playing. Giving your full attention to the music you enjoy is a great way to take notice. Take a break from your studies to put on some music that makes you really happy. Spend some time listening without any other distractions.

Do you notice any changes whilst you are listening – are you smiling? Do you feel relaxed? Or do you feel like dancing? (if so, go for it!)

Ask yourself afterwards – did it feel any different to just sit and listen to music? Did the music evoke any memories? How do you feel now that you have done this, are you ready to go back to studying?

Take a moment to reflect on 'take notice'

- What does take notice mean to you? Why do you think taking notice is so important for your study and wellbeing? How might you take more notice of your own surroundings, i.e., the natural world around you?
- Thinking of the poem Take Notice by Kitty why not stop what you are doing NOW and:
 - o Slow down and take this moment
 - o Breathe, and smile inside
- Identify one thing you can do every day this week to 'take notice'.
- What might your next steps be to develop more attention and focus in your life?



THE OUTSIDE

WORLD

by Natalie Nussey - Student in Education Studies (Primary)

The morning sun greets me this day like a kiss from heaven.

Its embrace a gentle beckon to venture out

Into this post pandemic world. O the enticement

But O the comfort of the safety of these walls,

Old friends, you have been to me. Cold and unforgiving

Yet strangely comforting and all encompassing.

What lies beyond the secure attachment of these soft furnishings?

Adventures anew or the unforgiveness of further prejudice and pride,

My thoughts drift over to times gone by as light rays illuminate darkest corners

Societal change, the chasm between rich and poor widened,

Yet a glimmer of hope. Could it be that little me might bring a flicker

Of hope, a shaft of luminary in a cloak of division.

Not I but all those who sense the call to come outside and believe again,

To fan into flames those whose light has dimmed.

Salutations and a tentative step, into the dawn I go.

Reflecting on this poem, ask yourself – when are you going to wake up and go outside first thing in the morning to embrace whatever light greets you? Consider how the outdoors changes throughout the day – if you like getting up early what do you notice about your environment that differs to the afternoon or evening?

Useful links

[The Mindful Life – mindfulness for carers](#)

Visit the [Zentangle website](#)

Search for mindfulness and wellbeing at the [OU library](#)

[Mindfulness exercises you can try today](#)

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1. Mind (2020) Five ways to wellbeing.

Available at: <https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-yourself/five-ways-to-wellbeing/>

2. NHS (2018) Mindfulness. Available at: <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/tips-and-support/mindfulness/>

3. Vseteckova, J., Methley, A. and Lucassen, M. (2021) The benefits of mindfulness and five common myths surrounding it. Available at: <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/health-sports-psychology/mental-health/the-benefits-mindfulness-and-five-common-myths-surrounding-it>



LEARN

Learning throughout our life not only enhances self-esteem but also encourages more social interaction through sharing our learning and knowledge with others. When we learn new skills and join groups of like-minded people who have similar interests and hobbies we can become more active. According to Mind (2017)¹ learning also helps with our ability to cope with stress and gives us a sense of purpose and hope.

This section has been developed by student ambassador, Kitty French. On learning she says:

‘This is something I am passionately keen to advocate for, as I truly believe in the transformational power of learning at any age. As I write this, I am a 36 year old student on the final stretch of my second year of my degree, and here at the OU, I see how supportive and encouraging the organisation is in making education accessible for everyone, no matter where they are in their life journey. Learning doesn’t just suddenly stop when you leave formal education. Lessons are around us everywhere, every day and not just in the academic sense, so to me, I personally attribute learning to being that

of a diamond. If you look at it from one angle, you will only ever see what is on the surface, but if you tilt the diamond, you will see so many other angles of colour, light, tone and depth. What if you sought out these new angles and perspectives of knowledge that you previously weren’t aware of? This is the importance of continual learning, and as an OU student, this is exactly what I chose to do, embedded by my belief that learning is a lifelong treasure chest where every day, I seek out these new angles.’

AMELIORATE

by Bliss Louisa Ratter - Student in Psychology

Finding purpose and meaning is fundamental for your wellbeing

Intoxicate yourself with knowledge

Invest in your education and be willing to keep on reading

Following a new direction, you will find correction

Ameliorate and expand your understanding

Approach self-improvement with awareness and reflection

An oath of personal growth benefits your satisfaction

Revel in new discoveries and persist along the voyage

Embrace the unknown with excitement yet without distraction

Determination and motivation lead to compensation

Focus and find your own individual pace

It's important to remember that learning is not a race.

Student story by Kitty French - Student in Early Childhood

Being a student in Early Childhood, I can absolutely say that creativity, without a doubt is the one thing that we encounter at an early age and carry with us throughout our life journey. How we use this creativity is unique to individuals but in our never-ending learning quest, I have discovered how powerful creativity can be. As a person who has always loved the freedom of expression that can be created through art, I wanted to share with you two art concepts that have really cemented this insight to me.

Art Journaling came to me as a form of sharing messages with loved ones who had passed away, giving me a continued conversation with them, through creating a book that documented all the milestones my life had been through. This helped me to reflect on who I was, and I feel that it has helped me to learn a lot about myself. By continuing the book, I can keep connecting to this creative learning, through colour, images, words, poems, photos and songs.

Neurographic Art is a new art concept that provides a simple way to work with the subconscious mind through drawing. I see it as a good "thinking space", as it allows the brain to focus on the connection of creativity, whilst allowing the person to stop, pause and focus on something completely different. It is such an accessible and easy way to de-stress, unwind and give you back some time with the creative child within you, as it allows the freedom to create without abandon, and that is the gift of keeping learning, there is always something new out there to explore, just like the children I look after do everyday.



Activities

Student Hub Live – why don't you attend a SHL session, where they run a whole host of interactive, live broadcasts on a range of topics that can develop your study skills. Many students have suggested the skills developed here improve their grades.

Feedback tracker – create a table where you can keep your assessment feedback in one place. It's a simple but effective way of noting your grade, how you achieved this, what you need to work on going forward. We've put a template you could use later in this handbook (Page X).

OU library sessions – look out for training sessions that are run by the OU library. If you are new to The Open University, this introduction to Library Services might be useful.

Swap a skill – everyone is good at something, maybe photography, baking, languages. Try something new by asking a friend or family member to teach you one of their skills and, in return, you could teach them something too.

Undertake an OpenLearn course – whilst we don't want to add to a busy workload, perhaps in your down time you could take a look at OpenLearn. There are thousands of free, online courses that might interest you. So get inspired and learn something new today. This could help boost your CV and your employability too.

Take a moment to reflect on 'learn'

- What does learning mean to you? How can you keep learning in ways that are important for your wellbeing?
- Thinking of the poem *Ameliorate*, what do you consider as having meaning and purpose in your life at present? What are you most passionate about? What sparks your imagination and your curiosity? How do you maintain your motivation to keep on studying your module?
- After reading how Kitty has used Art Journaling and Neurographic Art, maybe you can have a go and use this form of art to suit your own needs.
- What might your next steps be to continue and develop your learning?

Useful links

Visit [OpenLearn](#) for free interactive courses

Learn more about [Neurographic Art in this video](#)

The Open University's [Personal Development Plan](#)

1. Mind (2017) Keep Learning (5 Ways to Wellbeing). Available at: <https://www.mindcharity.co.uk/wellbeing-article/keep-learning-5-ways-wellbeing/>

LEARN SOMETHING NEW

EACH DAY - LEARNING

**SOMETHING NEW EVERY
SINGLE DAY CAN BE GREAT
FOR OUR WELLBEING. IT
CAN HELP US PERCEIVE
THE WORLD DIFFERENTLY,
MAKE US BETTER
EQUIPPED AT ADAPTING
TO NEW SITUATIONS, AND
CAN INSPIRE CREATIVITY.**

BE ACTIVE

Whatever your age, there is strong scientific evidence that being physically active can help you lead a healthier and happier life (NHS, 2021)¹. The benefits of physical activity are extensive, and according to the World Health Organisation (2021)², being active can help prevent and manage noncommunicable diseases, reduce the symptoms of depression and anxiety, and improve your overall wellbeing. Furthermore, being active is essential for slowing age-related cognitive decline and for promoting well-being.

It's worth remember that physical activity doesn't need to be particularly intense for you to feel good. Slower paced activities, such as walking, can have the benefit of encouraging social interactions as well providing some level of exercise.

This final wellbeing theme has been developed with student ambassador, Yasmin Reeve.

Activities

The reality is, not everyone wants to participate in sport or exercise. Therefore the activities below focus more on the subtle changes you can make to your life which will boost your activity levels, rather than encouraging you to join a club or gym.

- Go for a walk at lunchtime or in between study sessions. If you can 'connect' with a colleague or friend, then you get double points!
- Organise your study activities outside.
- Utilise the pomodoro technique – work solidly, without distractions for 25 minutes. Then use your five-minute break for some stretching or similar. This is a popular study strategy which focuses on efficient time management. Read Digital Marketing student Emily Hunt's suggestions for honing your productivity in her article on the OU news website.
- If you use public transport, could you get off one stop early and walk the final part of your journey?
- Have light hand-weights that you can move while sitting or standing
- When in the office, take a walk to a colleague's desk rather than calling or emailing them.
- Gardening is a great way to increase our levels of physical activity
- If you do want to join a local fitness club, don't forget to see if they offer a student membership.



Being active by Yasmin
Reeve – Student in
Sport and Fitness

Student story by Yasmin Reeve - Student in Sport and Fitness

What I have found helpful is getting up and going for walks. There's nothing that quite beats the fresh air getting into your system to either set you up to study, give you a break from studying or wind down after studying. A walk doesn't mean you have to go miles or spend hours outside, it can simply be a walk around your street, a few laps of a garden or even walking round the house a few times. Walking gives my brain a chance to clear which means I can really focus on my study.

Here are my top tips for getting started with this:

- Plan your study time and allow an extra 15 minutes (or more if you wish) in order to go for a walk.
- Get everything set up so when you return home you can simply sit down and crack on with studying.
- Start off slow and take in the things that are around you. What colours do you see? Smell the air. What is the texture of the floor like? This links really nicely to 'take notice'.
- This '[Walking step for beginners](#)' page has some further advice.

You might find the article I wrote on OpenLearn interesting, where I discuss [coaching and disability sport](#).

Take a moment to reflect on 'be active'

- What does being active mean to you? How can you be active in ways that you enjoy and that are important for your own wellbeing?
- How might you be active with other people so that you can increase connections and also help to motivate each other?
- Where and how might you be active outdoors so that you can breathe the fresh air and take notice of the natural world?
- What might your next steps be to bring a little more physical activity into your life one step at a time?

Useful links

Visit the [NHS Couch to 5K](#) webpage

Read more about [the Active10 app](#)

The [NHS benefits of exercise](#)

[Physical activity for health and wellbeing in the caring role](#) free course on Open Learn

Take a look at [NHS gym-free workouts](#)

Over 500 free workout videos on [Fitness Blender](#)

References

1. NHS (2021) Benefits of exercise. Available at: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/exercise-health-benefits>

2. World Health Organisation (2020) Physical activity. Available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/physical-activity>





MORE ACTIVITIES

The activities in this section aren't linked directly to any particular wellbeing theme that has already been explored within this handbook.

However, you will find that they cover several, overlapping ways of wellbeing. Give some, or all, of them a try when you feel like you might need a little further support with your mental health and wellbeing.





Activity – what makes me

Doing this will set the tone for your day and get you moving in a positive direction.

Complete these sentences:

Yesterday I..

Today I'm feeling...

Tomorrow I'll...

and next week I'll be...

I'm stronger when I'm...

I'm wiser when I'm...

I'm angry when...

and sad when...

I'm joyous when...

I'm grateful when/to...

I love my/to...

And that's what makes me, me.

Activity – workstation wellbeing

As you settle into routines for study, workstations which facilitate effective learning whilst also supporting wellbeing, are essential. An organised workstation means fewer distractions, which improves our concentration and reduces fatigue. Take a few moments to:

- Look around your workstation environment. Is it cluttered? If so, the visual cortex of your brain is probably over-whelmed, reducing concentration levels. Watch this student vlog to appreciate the wellbeing benefits of Tidy Desk, Tidy Mind and have a quick tidy up of your own workstation.
- Picture the scene – it's TMA deadline day and you have lost the file on your computer. Panic ensues! Why not try to alleviate this before it happens by organising how your study work is stored? Take a look at the guidance on the Open University Help Centre - How to organise your computer files.

Activity – feeling at your best

Here you will reflect on what makes you feel at your best.

3 activities that make you forget what time it is

3 activities that always get you moving

3 times that you experienced a great mood

3 people who you love to be around

3 places that calm or energise you

Activity – electronic sticky notes

When you open up your personal device for a day of study, open the sticky notes and write out a positive affirmation. It might start with:

I am...

I will...

I won't...

I must try to...

At the end of your study session add an emoji which represents how well you stuck to the affirmation. Collect the sticky notes like a mini reflection that you can look back on each week, month or even year.

Activity – desert island discs

Music can play a significant role in our wellbeing and many of us like to listen to our favourite songs when we study.

With that in mind, why don't you create a study playlist that both energises and inspires you? Take time to decide upon one track each day and collate. Perhaps you would like different playlists for each study task – reading, note taking, TMA writing, celebrating grades etc.

You could share it on your forums so that others can see what you have been listening to and encourage them to share their favourite study songs, artists or playlists.

If you like, you can listen to the playlist created by students from Childhood and Youth, and Sport and Fitness pathways. It's so interesting to hear the diversity of choice in tracks.

Activity – finding the time, place and motivation to study

Take a picture or draw a plan of your study space and identify features that are important to you and why.

If you work in more than one space, think about why one space suits you more than another and when.

Identify and change anything which could make this space(s) more comfortable, more inviting, more motivational. This might mean moving things from the rest of your life into or out of the spaces depending on how you feel about connecting or separating study from wider life activities and relationships.



FEEDBACK TRACKER TEMPLATE

Remember in the Learn section you were introduced to the idea of an assessment feedback tracker – you can use this template to consolidate your tutor’s feedback. We suggest that you print this page off and handwrite into the boxes, and then display the page prominently when completing your next assessment.

We have completed an example for you.

Assignment and grade	What did I do well?	What do I need to work on for next time?
E232 TMA01 - 65	Provided evidence to support my points. Researched beyond the module materials. Good essay structure.	Develop referencing skills. Ensure I keep focused on the question. Be less descriptive and offer more critical analysis.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY BINGO

How many of these can you tick off in the coming weeks?

Use the stairs instead of a lift/escalator	Grab some tins out of the kitchen and see how many bicep curls you can do	Take a lunchtime walk for at least 20 minutes	Rather than sitting down, walk around whilst you are talking on the phone	Pick up the gloves and do some gardening
Do some back, neck and shoulder stretches at your desk	Try to get up and move around for at least three minutes every hour whilst working/studying	Dance to your favourite song	Walk to a coffee shop to meet a friend	Use an app, e.g. Break Timer, to ensure you move around throughout the day
See how many star jumps you can do in one minute	Play catch with a ball, screwed up, rolled-up socks or similar	Rest day – take today off to do something you really enjoy	March on the spot with high knees for two minutes	Play volleyball with a member of your household with some balled-up socks (or similar)
Spring clean your study workspace	Calculate how many steps you walked today. Increase this each day for a week.	Go for a lunchtime run/jog	Do 10 minutes of stretching	Take a selfie on an evening walk
Do 90 seconds of tricep dips at your desk	Start a 25 minute physical activity streak – at least three days in a row	Engage in physical activity with a friend or partner	Complete some early morning physical activity (before work/study)	Have a walking meeting

FURTHER SUPPORT

Open University links

[Help Centre](#) - Mental health and wellbeing

[Help Centre](#) – Mental wellbeing

External links

[NHS every mind matters](#) - general mental health and wellbeing guidance

[The Mix](#) - wellbeing and associated issues specifically for under 25's

[Student Minds](#) - guidance, support and programme tailored specifically towards students

[My Mind Health](#) - feel it, write it, delete it approach to emotional wellbeing

[Black Minds Matter](#) – UK charity connecting Black individuals and families with free mental health services

[LGBT Health and Wellbeing](#) – Scotland's national charity promoting the health, wellbeing and equality of LGBT+ adults

[LGBT Foundation](#) – England's national charity delivering advice, support and information services to LGBT communities

[LGBT Cymru](#) – Providing general information, advice and confidential support to people in Wales

[Rainbow Project](#) - Northern Ireland's foremost LGBTQIA+ Charity

[Clear Your Head](#) - Scottish Government's campaign

[Valleys Steps](#) – Welsh charity, helping people to help themselves

[MindWise](#) – Northern Ireland charity, supporting and empowering people affected by mental health issues to live their best lives

Support lines

[Anxiety UK](#) - Support, advice and information on all anxiety, stress and anxiety-based depression conditions

[NHS mental health help lines directory](#) - List of general and charity sector support lines

[No Panic helpline](#) - support line for anxiety disorders including experiencing a panic attack

[Shout](#) – a free, confidential, 24/7 text messaging support service for anyone who is struggling to cope

[Side by Side](#) - listen, share and be heard in Mind's moderated online community

Mobile apps

Action for Happiness - daily companion for a happier life. Receive simple, daily actions designed to boost your wellbeing and happiness

Calm – mindfulness and meditation to help lower stress and anxiety

Catch It – learn to look at problems differently, turn negative thoughts into positive ones and improve your mental wellbeing

Feeling Good – improve your thought, feelings, self-esteem and self-confidence using the principles of cognitive therapy

Thrive – use games to track your mood and learn methods to control stress and anxiety

Ten Percent Happier – feel good with guided meditations, videos and talks



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