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**STRESS AMONG STUDENTS DURING MCO**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The struck of COVID-19 pandemic had affect education institutions such as kindergarten, schools and Universities in Malaysia to close during the Movement Control Order (MCO) period. Therefore, online class or Online Distance Learning (ODL) is another alternative used by education institutions to continue its syllabus. The application of ODL during MCO had affect students in terms of stress. Therefore, researchers have identified the factors that contribute to stress and the consequences of stress among students. For the methodology of this research, the researchers follow the research design of qualitative method. Next, the unit analysis of this research is individual. It is because researchers interviewed eight different students from various universities in Malaysia. The type of interview applied in this research is structured interview. The researchers conducted the interview online using the virtual platform such as Skype, Whatsapp video call and Facetime. Moreover, the researchers used two different sampling method to choose the interviewees. Next, researchers used thematic analysis to analyze data that was recorded after the interview sessions. The data from interview are kept as transcript and references. From the findings, researchers succeeded in identifying the factors of stress and the consequences of stress during MCO. Most of the interviewee gave their opinion but with similar answers. In conclusion, MCO is a great alternative to break the COVID-19 chain but also a challenge to students around the world.*

**Keywords:** Stress, Online Distance Learning, MCO, online class.

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The Coronavirus is a type of common virus that results in fever, respiratory problems and other flu-like symptoms that depends on the type of coronavirus. World Health Organization (WHO) (2020), stated that the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is an infectious disease that was caused by the newly discovered coronavirus. The origins of this disease and virus was anonymous until the outbreak in Wuhan, China started as of December, 2019. Since then, COVID-19 has caused a global pandemic that has not yet subsided. There are also no known vaccines for the said virus to-date.

Malaysia declared its first Covid-19 case on 25th January 2020 that involved three China tourists who travelled to Johor from Singapore as reported by The Star (2020). As of 16th February, the number of cases increased and resulted to the first wave of cases. The second wave then began on the same month and since then the number of people affected by the coronavirus has skyrocketed. The latest update on 3rd May has resulted to 6298 of total cases, 112 new cases, 105 total of deaths and 4413 that have recovered. To curb the spread of the virus, Malaysia Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin announced a Movement Control Order (MCO) on 18 March, which had been extended twice since then as reported by Nortajudin (2020). The third phase of the MCO was announced on 10<sup>th</sup> April, where it will be effective from 15<sup>th</sup> April until 28<sup>th</sup> April. Due to this partial lockdown, all government and private premises except for essential services are to be closed. Which includes education institutions such as kindergartens, schools, universities.

Following that statement, according to Arumugam (2020), since The Movement Control Order (MCO) has made some people feel anxious and stressed due to being confined in their homes. Medical experts stated that information overload about COVID- 19 may lead to mental health issues. The Health Ministry expresses their concern and advises citizens to take care of their mental wellbeing. The ministry's Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services (MHPSS) (2020), acknowledges that it is fairly common for emotions such as stress and anxiousness to surface in individuals during trying times like the current pandemic. Everyone reacts or responds differently to stressful situations. How an individual reacts to it is influenced by their background, the differences compared to others, and the community they live in (Ridzuan et al., 2017).

Students being adversely affected because of the Movement Control Order has also raised a concern in the community. According to Broderick (2020), stress is a hurdle that students experience in their lifetime in learning. Short term stress actually does well to them as they will be able to raise their grades or further polish their writing and manage to pursue further in their career options. Long-term stress, however is detrimental for students. A huge sum of college students have reported that their stress affects their work, and having their stress left unchecked can lead to side effects to their health such as a weakened immune system.

The Movement Control Order has been extended for months and this has taken a toll on students a lot more than they had been prepared for. This could create long-term stress in them following the must to obey the MCO. Stated by Melnyk (2020), students who faced by their anxiousness and stress during the COVID-19 outbreak should not feel that they are alone as many learners are experiencing higher levels of stress compared normal stress and anxiety levels as of currently.

## **2. PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The global pandemic has impacted everyone and that does not exclude students. Currently online learning is being implemented so that students will not be left out on their syllabus. While that may be the best course of action, there are problems that arise from it. Students are having problems being at home during this period and are building up stress and their mental health is not at their best combined with all the workload. Especially the ones that already have anxiety and other emotional problems.

As reported by Bin (2020) that a clinical psychologist, Dr. Aisya Musa says students might feel the loss of routine in their lives as a result of suspension of schools. While being in school and university, there is a routine set there that they have already adapted to. However, now without the certainty of a routine to help cope with change, form healthy habits as well as reduce stress levels, panic can start setting in. Panic and over exertion may lead to a fatal burnout, which can develop into more major problems inside themselves. There is also the probability that some students are facing an external problem regarding their surroundings that are not suitable for academic development, following the statement above, stress comes in different forms for students when they must cope with their studies while being away from the normal education environment that will definitely affect their performance in studies. There are also technical problems where internet connection is not strong in the areas that the student is living in. There could be circumstances that will inevitably happen that is out of the student's control. Zirnkle (2001) identified specific challenges facing distance learners as programmed costs, lack of equipment and infrastructure, instructional concerns and poor technical assistance.

### 3.0 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How stress developed among students during the Movement Control Order?
- Why students become stress in this pandemic?
- How would you as a student, manage your stress during MCO?

### 3.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

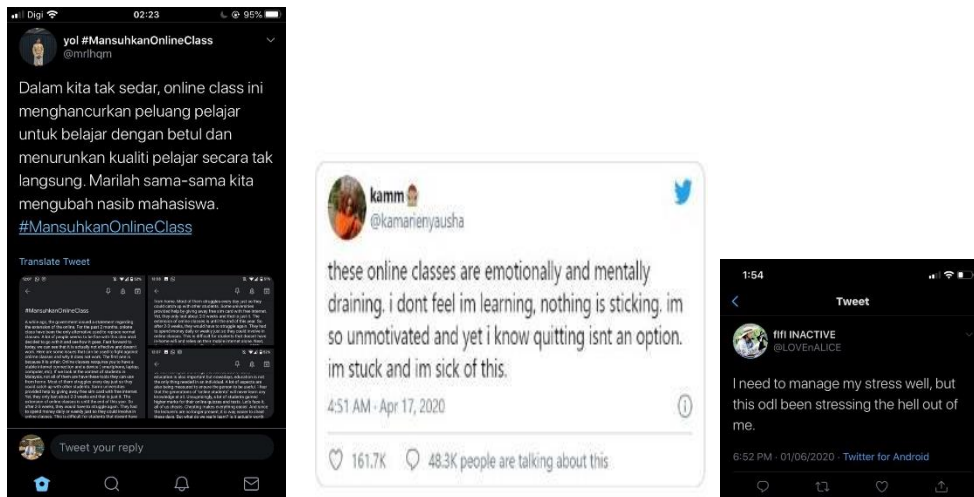
- To study how stress developed among students during Movement Control Order.
- To determine the factors of stress among students during the pandemic.
- To identify the ways that students are doing to manage their stress during MCO.

### 4.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 4.1 Ways stress developed among students during MCO

According to Lim (2020), students in Malaysia from few universities may already have practice the use of online class before COVID-19 pandemic struck as a supplement to lectures. After more than two months of conducting Online Distance Learning (ODL) due to the Movement Control Order (MCO) and Conditional Movement Control Order (CMCO), the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia announced that all institutions of higher learning will be fully conducting an online-only learning activities until 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020. According to Lim (2020), president Yap Wen Qing from University of Malaya Association of New Youth (Umany) said students are generally doing fine coping with ODL, except during the earlier period when they were starting to adapt with the new system. However, some students asserted their struggle over the e-learning mode due to stress, as lecturers tend to give more assignments in e-learning mode (Qing, 2020).

On 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2020, a tweet posted by user @imrlhqm have gained attention from Malaysian students as most of them shared the same opinion with his tweet. He also created a hashtag #MansuhkanOnlineClass which was used by other twitter user to share their opinion on the issue. His tweet was shared by many and received various response from students, lecturers and ordinary twitter user. Based on @imrlhqm tweet post, he mentioned that he prefer traditional class setting than online class. In addition, few other students also have shared their experience and opinion on ODL. Below are screenshots of tweet from different students. In addition, few other students also have shared their experience and opinion on Online Distance Learning. Below are screenshots of tweet from different students on this issue.



## 4.2 Factors of stress among students during the pandemic

### 4.2.1 Online Distance Learning (ODL)

As stated by Kokemuller (n.d), online class do have its downsides despite the demand has increased in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Firstly, ODL requires less direct contact between students and lecturers. Communication typically occurs via email and in virtual discussion forums. For instance, Google Meet and Zoom Meeting. While this can aid in learning technology, it has a negative impact on the ability of a student to interact with lecturers, ask questions and get immediate assistance. ODL is also a problem for social and group work that takes place informally (Kokemuller, n.d).

### 4.2.2 Lack of Internet Access

The most important tool for attending online class is having a stable and fast internet access because of the virtual platforms. According to a survey reported by NCES (2020), there are roughly 5 million households with undergraduate-age children who do not have a broadband internet access at home. As a result, students will face barriers to connectivity which cause them to being left behind (Lynch, 2020). Lack of internet access can affect the academic performance of a student in many ways, Firstly, students with low internet connection are unable to connect with lecturers or classmates, they are unable to do independent research or get help from assignments online (Lynch, 2020). This issue slowly increase the stress level of a student.

Secondly, inability to complete the task assigned by lecturer before deadlines. More than 70% of lecturer assigned task that requires the use of internet and about 65% students uses the internet to complete their task. For instance, doing research, assignments submissions, emailing lecturers and group work with classmates. However, students with lack of internet access may fall behind which lead to stress.

### **4.2.3 Environment**

Home environment affects students' ability to learn in so many ways. Firstly, both home and universities differ in terms of facilities such as library, proper traditional class setting and a dorm room (Copper, 2018). At university, students can have more privacy compared to being at home because there are distractions from family members. As stated by Graetz (n.d), the physical characteristics of learning environments can emotionally affect the students, with significant cognitive and behavioral consequences. While emotional reactions to environmental stimuli have been shown to vary widely across individuals and activities, most students would likely find learning difficult in a house environment.

## **4.3 Ways for students to manage stress**

### **4.3.1 Time Management**

Quarantine gives more flexibility for students to manage their time wisely while still doing their duty as a student. According to an article by Roshni (2017), effective time management could tremendously lower or reduce stress, and that also applies to academic stress.

According to Scott (2019), mapping a schedule is an effective way to manage time. Many people fail to do it as overestimate the amount of time to complete every task given.

Secondly, a preferred approach to planning for students should be setting a regular but flexible weekly schedule and making a daily task list (Perez, 2017). Students should start by listing out all their classes, then afterward they should estimate the hours that are necessary for them to be able to achieve and maintain in being successful in all their classes

### **4.3.2 Connect with people**

Social distancing has made it difficult for people to meet and interact normally as they have done before but it should not deter them from maintaining relationships. Ducharme (2019) stated that having a robust social life will help lower stress levels, improve mood and encourage positive health behaviours. Merrill (2020) suggests to host virtual happy hours by using the platforms such as Zoom, Skype, Google Hangout and all other platforms that functions for people to interact together online. It is definitely not the same as hanging out face to face but it at least keeps the social going until meeting up is possible.

### **4.3.3 Taking up a new hobby**

According to Harper (2020), hobby is a good distraction to problems. Although people should confront it, overwhelming stress can result to issues such as anxiety. Therefore, having something else to focus on could be a good relief. A sense of fulfilment could also be instilled by a hobby, it allows a person to do things for themselves just for their own satisfaction instead of committing all their effort on duties and work. Yabsley (2019) says that to challenge oneself, they should try taking part in a hobby that is in contrast of their skills. As an example, if they are amazing at mathematic, they should try learning a language. Wolff (2026) suggests that yoga is a good choice when it comes to alleviating stress. Yoga does not just improve flexibility and strength, it can also focus on breathing and also deepens the mind-body connection. Studies have proven that yoga can help elevate the body's physiological stress response, and also lowers the chances of depression and anxiety.

## **5.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **5.1 Research Design**

#### **Qualitative Research**

This research about students' stress level of students during MCO using ODL system uses the format and guidelines of qualitative research method. According to Maxwell (2009), qualitative researchers try and describe and interpret human behaviour based fully on the words of selected individuals that are labelled as "informants" or "respondents".

### **5.2 Data Collection Strategy**

#### **Interview Type: Structured Interview**

Researchers had conducted structured interview to collect data for this research. Before the interview was carried out, researchers had come up with 3 questions as the focus in order to get sufficient information regarding the topic of research. The informants that were interviewed were of 8 people in total, whom are university students. The students respectively study in Brickfield's Asia College, University of Malaya, UiTM, Unisza, International Islamic University Malaysia and Universiti Putra Malaysia. Structured interviews refer to interviews where the questions are created and planned beforehand and the same questions will be asked to all candidates in the same order. Thus, it is convenient to make comparison of the answers obtained using structured interview. (Pollock, 2019)

**Stated below are the list of students that were interviewed by the researchers:**

- i) Ku Tze Xin (Brickfield's Asia College)**
- ii) Maryam Naqibah Bt. Mohd Adam (University of Malaya)**
- iii) Nasha Nur Qistina Bt Zalman (UiTM Alor Gajah)**
- iv) Laila Nadhirah Bt. Rudialfian (UiTM Sg. Buloh)**
- v) Sharifah Nur Aliyya Bt. Syed Najib (UiTM Alor Gajah)**
- vi) Fatimah Arrahimah Bt. Rosli (Unisza)**
- vii) Mohamad Noreizlan Bin Norisham (IIUM)**
- viii) Farah Dinah Bt Farid Basheer (Universiti Putra Malaysia)**

### **5.3 Unit of Analysis**

According to Roller & Lavrakas (2015), one of the first step in the qualitative data analysis process is the selection of a unit of analysis. The unit of analysis for this research is individual because researchers focus mainly on students. Moreover, researchers have interviewed 8 students from different universities through Skype, Whatsapp video call and Facetime.

### **5.4 Sampling Method**

#### **I. Sampling Method: Non-Probability Sampling**

The sampling type involve of two category which is probability sampling and non-probability sampling. A probability sampling method is any method of sampling that utilizes some form of random selection. In order to have a random selection method, must set up some process that assures the different units in the population that have equal probabilities of being chosen (Trochim, 2020). Non- probability sampling is a sampling technique where the difference of any member being selected for a sample cannot be measured (Stephanie, 2015). It is the differing of probability sampling, where can calculate the differences.

#### **II. Purposive Sampling**

A purposive sample assign to as a judgmental or expert sample, is a type of nonprobability sample (Lavrakas, 2008). The main purpose of a purposive sampling is to produce a sample that can be logically assumed to be delegate of the population. The purposive sampling of this research targets students because it aims to ask students about how they stress during this MCO. They are the right person to give some input and opinion about their emotion of stress during this MCO. The researchers choose students because they are one of the groups that need to handle their emotion during MCO.



## 5.5 DATA ANALYSIS

### Thematic Analysis

Thematic Analysis is a category of qualitative analysis. According to Caulfield (2019), Thematic Analysis is a method of analyzing qualitative data. It is usually applied to a set of texts, such as interview transcripts. The researcher closely examines the data to identify common themes topics, ideas and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly.

## 6.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### **RO 1: How stress developed among students during MCO?**

Based on Ku Tze Xin and Maryam Naqibah, a student from Brickfields Asia College and University of Malaya said that online class is the factor how stress developed among students during MCO. Both mentioned that they noticed the stress developed among students are through their friends and mutual. Ku Tze Xin said “I can tell the stress level that is developing in students are quite high looking from my friends. I do have friends who are constantly worried about assignments submissions, quizzes and the exam date shifts”. “I can see from the postings of my friends. From my peers they’re talking about how stressful they are during this pandemic, during this MCO especially” said Maryam Naqibah.

According to Laila Nadhirah from UiTM Sungai Buloh, said that staying home is a distraction from completing her assignments and most of her time are spent on social media. She added “guilt about not being able to perform normal work and study through online learning sometime making me more stress”. According to Sharifah Nur Aliyya, a student from UiTM Alor Gajah said that online classes is the reason stress developed among students during MCO. She also mentioned “It is difficult for students to adapt because this is a new phase for student and they are not fully prepared”. While according Mohamad Noreizlan from IIUM said that students are having a very difficult time during this pandemic as students are going through online class.

### **CONCLUSION REMARKS:**

The implementation of Online Distance Learning (ODL) or online class is slowly developing stress among students during this MCO. As mentioned above, physical class had to be cancelled due to COVID-19 pandemic, therefore syllabus had to be continued through virtual forums. Eye-contact and body language are hard to incorporate in online classes. This critical human touch can be lost in pedagogy, and is likely to be an additional cause for increased stress (Munirah, 2020).

## **RO 2: Why students become stress in this pandemic?**

### **1. Online Distance Learning**

According to Ku Tze Xin, the student of Brickfields Asia College, student have hard time to attend online class because the environment is different. Sitting in the class and sitting in the room of home is different to keep stay focus on the lecture. She said, “they will have a hard time attending online classes because either they are being left out or looked after”. Other than that, there are students who does not even have a laptop.

Based on Maryam Naqibah Binti Mohd Adam, the student of University Malaya, the general factor is because of the online class itself. She personally said, “Our lecturers always expect us to be available at all time and because we are staying at home, they think we are doing nothing because we cannot go out, so they will give assessment continuously without fail”. She also adds during online classes student must face the laptop all the time, then after class they must complete the assignments which means student have to face the laptop again.

### **2. Lack of Internet Access**

According to Ku Tzi Xin, the student of Brickfields Asia College, bad internet connections also triggers students to become more stressed. This does not apply to students who have the privileged and the benefit of good internet connections. Unfortunately, there are students who does not even have a laptop, not to mention having good internet connections.

Based on Sharifah Nur Aliyya Binti Syed Najib, the student of UiTM Alor Gajah, she said, “one of the main reasons students stress during this pandemic is that some of the students have internet connection problems at their home so they have difficulty in learning new phases of learning”. She adds, if the student has a poor internet connection problem while studying online this will eliminate the student's focus and they will also be less aware of what their lecturer was teaching at the time.

### 3. Environment

According to Mohamad Noreizlan Bin Norisham, the student of International Islamic University Malaysia, family environment is the major factor. Some families are very supportive in this kind of online learning, but some families do not give support much. He said, some families that are not supportive like when it is the study time, they will suddenly call and ask to do chores and help so they are not very understanding”. Based on Nasha Nur Qistina Binti Zalman, the student of UiTM Alor Gajah, staying at home could be distracting for student to complete my assignments but, what make it worst it that the student cannot go out to the outside world to release their stress. Moreover, environment of unsupportive family members and overthinking also one of the triggers students to become stressed.

According to Fatimah Arrahimah Binti Rosli, the student of Unisza, she said, “certain family members do not really understand and ask for help when we are in the middle of a class”. She also adds, when you have done all those chores in the day, then at night you must do the assignments so it will be stressful for student during this MCO. Based on Farah Dinah Binti Farid Basheer, the student of University Putra Malaysia, the reason that student would be stressed is that there’s a lot of distractions because they at home. She is speaking from her personal experience, when you are at home, house chores is not that big of a deal but because you are constantly at home, it becomes a big distraction.

#### **CONCLUSION REMARKS:**

In overall, the reason that triggers students to become more stressed in this pandemic is online distance learning (ODL), internet connection and the environment around them. Some of the students said online distance learning that bring them to the stress because sometime when they want to use the internet, the internet connection is bad and low. This can trigger students to become stress during the online class with the lecturer. According to Ceuto (2016), if the internet connection is unstable and students stress level is flatten, the two things might have a lot more to do with one another than they think. The slow internet speeds can be the reason why students having stress, this might sounds weird, but students trying to handle with terrible broadband speeds could probably have intuited already. Basically, slow Internet is the worst.

### **RO 3: How would you as a student, manage your stress during this MCO?**

#### **1. Connecting with people**

Based on Maryam Naqibah Bt. Mohd Adam, a student from University Malaya, stated that reaching out to her friends is one of the reasons that she can manage her stress during MCO. She also said “even though they cannot be there physically but having someone just to listen to you is just enough”. She also added that it is not like the problem will be solve if she is complained but the idea of someone listening to you will carry away your burden.

According to Laila Nadhirah Bt. Rudialfian, a student from Uitm Sungai Buloh, she stated that connecting with people or attach to someone that she trust, and share everything with them can help her manage her stress during this MCO. She added that support each other’s back also can be one of the reasons how she manage her stress during this pandemic.

According to Sharifah Nur Aliyya Bt. Syed Najib, a student from Uitm Alor Gajah, stated that she managed her stress by reaching out or connect with her friends or classmates for guidance if she does not understand about her studies.

Based on Mohammad Noreizlan Bin Norisham, a student from International Islamic University Malaysia, stated that connected to people on social media can manage his stress during the MCO because according to him some people may feel secluded because of this pandemic. According to Farah Dinah, a student from University Putra Malaysia, stated that she keeps in contact with her friends so that she can feel less stressful during this pandemic.

#### **2. Taking up new hobby**

According to Maryam Naqibah Bt. Mohd Adam, a student from University Malaya, she stated that she try to set new things everyday such as try baking something she has never done before. She also added she will bake after she has finished her assessment she also said “I will feel motivated because I have the mindset of the quicker I finish my assessment, the quicker I can start baking”.

Based on Nasha Nur Qistina bt. Zalman , a student from Uitm Alor Gajah, stated that “student can manage the stress during this MCO by learning to cook new recipes.

### **3. Time management**

According to Ku Tze Xin, a student from Brickfields Asia College stated that she manage her time or routine during this pandemic. She said “what I do is as simple as tracking down my goal setting for that specific day”. She added for example she setting up her sleep routine and learn to stick up to it. By managing her time, she will feel less stress during this pandemic since she does not pressure herself to go extreme with it. Based on Maryam Naqibah bt. Mohd Adam a student from University of Malaya, said that she will manage her time or make a schedule a day before or a night before she went to sleep. For example, “sometimes we want to distract ourselves by playing games, surfing social media can be too distracted” she said. This is why according to her, the time management is very useful to manage her stress during this MCO.

According to Laila Nadhirah bt. Rudialfian, a student from Uitm Sungai Buloh, said that she manage her time by planning a daily routine and follow the plan. She also added that she needs to find a way on how to boost up her position energy. For example, “every morning listens to a motivational talk” she added. She also stated that plan on what you want to achieve in the future so if she forget or feeling down she will look back at the plan that she has made.

### **CONCLUSION REMARKS:**

Overall, the students are very well aware on how to manage their stress during this pandemic season although some of the interviewees claimed that family environment, internet connection problem can also be one of the factors on how they become stress in the first place. According to Robinson et al (2019) effective stress management helps you break the hold stress has on your life, so you can be happier, healthier, and more productive. The ultimate goal is a balanced life, with time for work, relationships, relaxation, and fun and the resilience to hold up under pressure and meet challenges head on.

### **7.0 CONCLUSION**

The researchers observe and identify the effect of stress in students, the causes of the stress and ways to reduce students stress during Movement Control Order (MCO). The objectives of the research are to determine the stress in students during MCO. Apart from that, to identify the cause of students’ stress in this pandemic. Lastly, to study the best cause of action that students are doing to manage their stress during MCO.

Based on the research, the researchers have found out that stress is prevalent in students during the MCO due to balancing academic and house duties. Students are struggling to keep up with Online Distance Learning and get more demotivated day by day to complete their assignments and study. The researchers recommend that students should try to take it slowly but consistently with work so it does not accumulate.

Next, internet connection problems are a major downturn in the students' efficiency to maintain their grades. There are areas that does not have stable internet connection for them to continue studying online, it will make them miss out a lot on the lectures and the workload. Thus, the researchers recommend that lecturers should provide materials that would be convenient for students to catch up if they are not able to attend to online classes and understand the students' situation.

The final note is that not only students have to find a solution to reduce and manage their stress, but family and the academic institution too need to play a role in helping students cope with their new norm of studying online due to safety measures by the government. The researchers hope that students can adapt well soon enough to get back on their feet and achieve good marks despite the new challenges they have to face with full support by all parties.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Students can manage their stress by getting enough sleep. If a person is getting a good and enough sleep, it will keep someone's stress levels manageable and not critical. Students must start manage their stress by getting sleep around 7 to 9 hours. Then, students must slowly stick to their sleep schedule.
- When students are feeling stressed, talking to a professional will help them to feel better either mentally and physically. Seeking help from a counsellor or therapist is a great coping mechanism. Seek help from close friends can help as well.
- Keeping in touch with family and friends will help to less the stress. When students share problems with someone they trust and getting advice on the issue will secure student's mental state. Moreover, connect with people through a phone call, is one of the easiest stress management techniques to incorporate into a person day.

- Managing stress as you pursue the online learning can often be as simple as taking a break. Sitting in one spot for hours for students while conducting online class is not good for their mind and the body. Therefore, as simple as standing up, stretching or go for a walk will help to boost students' energy. When taking a break, it does not have to be a complicated endeavor. It has to be an easy and effective way.
- The stress that students feel when pursuing any kind of higher education, online or offline can creep up on them. Trouble sleeping, a rapid heartbeat, depression, poor concentration, and many symptoms of stress can all increase. Take a moment to regularly check in with ourselves to gauge how the feeling, physically and mentally, then incorporate the stress management techniques that work best for them.

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